University of Alberta

Liminal Postmodernisms: The Case of Central and Eastern Europe

by

Irene Sywenky ©

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To my parents, with love and gratitude

and

To my daughter – you've been my inspiration

Abstract

The dissertation examines the phenomenon of Central and East European postmodernism in Poland, Ukraine and Russia as part of the development of the literatures of totalitarian and post-totalitarian periods and as part of the broader context of Western and international postmodernism. In this study I maintain that the reception of the literature of postmodernism in the countries in question was grounded in the geopolitics and ideology of conceptualization of these historically decentered cultures and in the prevalent understanding of postmodernism as an inherently Western phenomenon. Central and East European postmodernism(s) constitute a development simultaneous to the Western model, although analogies can be viewed as significant as differences, idiosyncracies, and the always complex and ambivalent issue of intertextual links and influences.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the theoretical issues that play an important role in approaching the problem of Central and East European postmodernism. Particular emphasis is placed on the significance of the geopolitical context in the reception of the cultures in question and the concepts of peripherality and postcoloniality. Postmodernism participated in the complex process of negotiation of the discussed cultures' status in a two-fold way: during the totalitarian period it constituted a discourse of resistance, and the conventions and aesthetic of socialist realism often functioned as a basis for this opposition; with the transition to the post-totalitarian period, postmodernism arguably served as one of the ideological tools of closing the cultural and epistemological gap with the West. Chapter 2 focuses on the representative postmodernist texts written during the totalitarian period (1960s-80s) and the way postmodernist aesthetic responded to and was actualized within the

totalitarian ideological structures. The discussed authors include Wilhelm Mach, Stanislaw Lem, Ievhen Hutsalo, Valerii Shevchuk, Venedict Erofeev and Andrei Bitov. Chapter 3 discusses the "second-wave" postmodernism of the post-totalitarian period (1990s – present) and some of the differences that demarcate the first and the second stages of postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe as impacted by different socio-political contexts. The discussed authors include Tomek Tryzna, Tomasz Sęktas, Manuela Gretkowska, Iurii Andrukhovych, Oksana Zabuzhko, and Valerii Zalotukha.

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Introduction

Central and East European Postmodernism and Comparative Literary Studies

The present study focuses on the phenomenon of postmodernism in the literatures of Central and Eastern Europe and the examination of a selection of representative texts from both the totalitarian and post-totalitarian periods in the context of the Soviet empire. Specifically, I will examine the literatures of Ukraine and Russia, the countries that were part of the former Soviet Union, and the literature of Poland, one of the satellite states of the former Soviet bloc. When it comes to the discussion of postmodernism in the West, not only the debate itself appears to have lost its academic appeal, it is largely believed that although postmodernity as a socio-economic phenomenon is still relevant to today's conditions (if one is to agree with various – if any – definitions of postmodernity), postmodernist aesthetic is no longer dominating the cultural scene. The context changes, however, once our attention shifts to the literatures and cultures of the region in question: the very idea of postmodernism in East European cultural communities had been dismissed for a long time, and although the debate was renewed in the 1990s, it has never attained any particular vigour – primarily because at the time the philosophy of deconstruction was losing its impact on the intellectual environment of Europe and North America and the Western discussion of postmodernism had long lost its initial momentum. Notwithstanding the fact that Central and East European literary communities produced a substantive body of works that can be situated in the framework of postmodernism and contributed to the corpus of the international canon in question, there has been no attempt to take a more comprehensive look at the phenomenon that undoubtedly still occupies a significant place in the development of these literatures.

The topic itself is inherently comparative, as it necessarily involves the broader context of philosophy and literary theory, consideration of the earlier established models of literary postmodernism in Western literature (1960s-70s),[1] as well as the problems of the world literary process (e.g., the issues of inclusion and exclusion, analogies, influences, and borrowings among others). The issue of comparativism itself, however, acquires here certain ambivalence as it betrays some of the older problems that have been plaguing the discipline for a long time. Goethe's announcement of the beginning of the age of *Weltliteratur* in 1827 and somewhat later introduction of the concept of *littérature comparée* by Villemain and popularization of the term by Saint-Beuve undoubtedly indicated the rise of a new cultural awareness. As Europe witnessed the emergence of a new cultural globalism – in the aftermath of the colonial expansion of the Renaissance and Enlightenment – this vision remained primarily utopian (and possibly still remains such); Goethe, Saint-Beuve and many of their contemporaries struggled with the inevitable limitations of the Romantic orientalism, and the problem of comparativism has been confined not just to European literatures, but, predominantly, to Western European literatures.[2] Although, arguably, with the coming into focus of postcolonial literatures, diasporic writing, literatures of "displacement" and various other marginal voices in the second half of the twentieth century, comparative literary studies started to accommodate some of the earlier ignored areas, many still maintain that these relatively small changes have not changed the situation in the comparative field. Thus, in the influenial 1993 American Comparative Literature Association discipline report by Charles Bernheimer, a particular emphasis is placed on "the extent to which the traditional internationalist notion of Comparative Literature paradoxically sustains the dominance of a few European national literatures. [Western] Europe is the home of the canonical originals, the proper object of comparative study; so-called "remote" cultures are peripheral to the discipline..." (1993 n.p.). A similar sentiment is expressed by David Damrosch in *What Is World Literature?*, where he talks in part about the dominance of the Euro-American cultural context (2003, esp. 1-36 [Introduction]), and one of the most recent overviews of the discipline maintains that "comparative literature has not lived up to these beginnings [i.e. Goethe's vision of *Weltliteratur*]. It's been a much more modest intellectual enterprise, fundamentally limited to Western Europe" (Moretti 2004, 148).

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[1] By "established models" I mean those representative writers in the West and their works that became acknowledged by the academic institution (i.e. they were popularized and "disseminated" by being analyzed in scholarly journals, being taught, anthologized etc.); thus, they came to represent the point of reference in the scholarship on postmodernism.

Returning to the immediate topic of this study, it has to be acknowledged that the scholarship of East European literatures in a broader comparative context does not seem to deconstruct Eurocentrism in comparative literature – because these literatures *are* European and belong in the tradition that is defined by the common cultural roots of European culture (e.g., such as the tradition of classical antiquity and, later, Christianity, among other factors); the problem, however, involves a very complex dynamics of geopolitical relations within Europe itself and thus exposes the new face of Eurocentrism – primarily because it makes Europe, and the West generally, acknowledge its cultural peripheries. The Slavic or East European studies has always maintained a slightly hermetic status; this is particularly strongly felt when it comes to the scholarship in the area of the twentieth-century literature. (Also, by comparison, the key works of the nineteenth century are more often included in the "world"/Western master canon, although even in this case the Russian tradition is the only one represented). On the other hand, there is no doubt that the political events of the twentieth century have contributed significantly to the discarding of the "lost" cultures in the studies involving comparative approaches and international literary processes, and led to the predominant exclusion of this material from the broader scope of comparativism. That gap has never really been closed, and it is noteworthy that the 2004 American Comparative Literature Association discipline report brought this issue into focus. Out of the five answers to the report two (!) were devoted to the discussion of the visible absence of Central and East European cultures in contemporary comparative scholarship – which, of course, only partially addresses the representative problems of today's comparative literature and comparative studies (see Emerson, "Answering for Central and Eastern Europe," 2004; Trumpener, "Response to the 2004 ACLA Report: A Geopolitical View," 2004). The publication in

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[2] This is not to say that there was no interest in Slavic studies. For example, Adam Mickiewicz, who is one of the key cultural icons of the nineteenth-century Poland, lectured on Slavic literatures in the prestigious Collège de France in Paris in the period of 1840-44. The lectures resulted in the publication of several volumes of history and criticism of Slavic literatures – both in French and in Polish – which served as an important source of reference for Western scholars in the nineteenth century and later (see Mickiewicz 1900, 1914).

2004 of the *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, eds.) in part was a response to the need to address the cultures in question in a broader, comparative perspective (the volume appeared in a series entitled "Comparative Histories of Literary Cultures" under the auspices of the University of Toronto Literary History Project, see Valdés and Hutcheon; it is also part of the ICLA sub-series "Comparative History of European Literatures").

Theorizing postmodernism in the context of Central and Eastern Europe (as well as in the context of any other "peripheral" region) is ultimately a political and ideological enterprise as it inevitably involves the negotiation of the "centre" / "periphery" dynamics. The very title of the thesis captures the tension inherent in the discussion of this material (the ironic gap constituted by the actual "liminality" of these postmodernisms and the geopolitical constructedness of cultural peripherality).[3] "De-ideologizing" the problem through its treatment from a purely literary and aesthetic perspective fails to acknowledge some of its more important moments, and namely, that it constitutes an on-going dialogue on the issues of national identity and national space, on the problem of history and national past, and on the process of globalization and construction of meaning in and about today's world, to name a few. Because Central and East European societies that were formerly part of the totalitarian empire(s) are located at the crossroads of (post-) colonial histories, these issues acquire particular relevance; also, negotiation of the status of these cultures in relation to the Western "centre" – although always prominent historically – gained more significance, political and other, in the last two decades or so. Notwithstanding the fact that methodologically this is not a reception theory study, it does – albeit indirectly – engage the issues of reception and processing of Central and East European postmodernism, particularly within the academic institution, both in the West and within the literary communities in question. In some ways such an approach is inevitable as it inheres in the very problematics of the field; for example, in attempting to define (yet again) the concept of world literature, Damrosch claims that it is "not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather *a mode of circulation and of reading*" (5, my emphasis). In part, this study explores some of the modes and mechanisms of circulation and reading of the phenomenon of Central and East European postmodernism itself, as well as the underlying ideologies of the different sides of the debate surrounding it. Coming back to the issue of academic fashion and the relevance of the topic, it should be emphasized that the problem of postmodernism still matters – both as a mode of artistic expression and as a major epistemological shift that impacted the way we see and conceptualize our world, its past and present, and our role in it. There is no doubt that "[m]odernity[4] [is] a central universalizing theme" (Wallerstein 1991, 175) of today's culture globally, and postmodernism captures the struggles with the anxieties of the modern world generally, and articulates the concerns related to more specific socio-political contexts.

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[3] The concept of "liminality," although common in today's literary and cultural studies, originated in Victor Turner's anthropology of performance (see Turner 1969, 1974, 1984). Turner's theorizing of the state of liminality, however, was not entirely original; he drew on the much earlier research of Arnold Van Gennep (1960 [1908]). By extension, the concept has been applied to both literary systems and the processes of literary/cultural production (cf. Woodbridge and Anderson's overview, 579). Here, the term is used to designate an "in-between" cultural space (for a more detailed discussion see Chapter 1).

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[4] Here modernity is to be understood in the broader sense, thus including – not opposing – what is conceptualized in this study as postmodernity.

Geopolitical Designations

Justification of the geopolitical designations used in this study is necessitated by the notable absence of unity in how various (and many) parts of Europe are conceptualized, categorized and labelled. The situation became even more complex after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, when parts of Central and the entire Eastern Europe underwent some radical political re-orienting. In this context the use of the concept "geopolitical" is significant in itself. The discussed designations are geopolitical (as opposed to geographical or geophysical) because ultimately they do not correspond to any objective structure and merely reflect the relativistic and perspectival positioning behind every particular usage. Even a cursory "subject" search of the catalogues of academic libraries, internet listings of research institutions specializing in the post-Soviet Central an Eastern Europe, electronic resources, and various coverage of the region in mass media since the 1990s suggests there is no consensus on this matter. The situation is succinctly captured in the following excerpt:

> Eastern Europe? Central Europe? East Central Europe? Southwestern Europe? Southeastern Europe? The Balkans? What name shall we use? The "groupings" are illusive and changing – based on myth, tradition, dreams, treaties, geography,

> trade-offs, history, symbols, perceptions, prejudice, power politics, arrogance, ignorance.... (Feig n.p.)

I would like to emphasize that mine are purely working designations used for the purpose of coherence and continuity. Although the concept of Eastern Europe as an umbrella term for all the states of former Soviet influence on European territory is still very pervasive, both in academic and lay discourses, I chose to differentiate between Central and Eastern Europe to acknowledge the growing tendency in many European states towards a greater need for self-identification within the broader context of European politics and culture. Even though the designation of Central Europe clearly has broader implications (e.g., Austria and sometimes Germany), in the framework of this study we will limit our interest to the region of the former Soviet influence.[5] The geopolitical aspects of this issue will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 1.

Justification of Material

The main focus of this study will be the literatures of Poland, Ukraine and Russia. With all the diversity of Central and East European region, these literary communities are of particular interest as they are representative of the way various cultures were positioned differently within the imperial context, which inevitably affected the way these respective literatures responded to and defined themselves within the totalitarian structure. Factors such as the extent of censorship and creative freedom, exposure to and exchange with other cultures, and earlier domestic literary tradition all play a significant role in defining the background for the discussion of postmodernist trends in these literatures.

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[5] Admittedly, in the context of this study the designation of East Central Europe would make more sense to avoid potential ambivalence of the more general term (Central Europe); I tried, however, to simplify the working terms, which was dictated primarily by the consideration of style (unavoidable repetitions and frequent references to both Central and East European contexts throughout the thesis). Another consideration was, of course, the fact that there is no one "correct" designation, all of them being relativistic constructs.

1) Polish cultural and literary space can be characterized as oriented towards the West to a very significant degree. Not only did the socialist ideology itself never really take root in this country, but literary/artistic socialist realism was also very short-lived there. Nevertheless, the impact of the years of Soviet influence is still felt in the literature of the 1990s as it seems to be coming to terms with the ghost of the imperial "other."

2) Ukraine constitutes a quintessential post-colonial state that went through successive empires for the period of about four hundred years. Belonging in the context of an ethnic minority that had always been the core of radical political dissent, Ukrainian literature suffered from the least freedom and had to negotiate more rigid artistic conventions.

3) If Poland and Ukraine represent different degrees and different aspects of the colonial and post-colonial condition, as well as different situatedness in relation to the West, Russia is of interest primarily as an imperial center and, later, post-imperial space. Considering, however, that Soviet imperialism was not based just on national/territorial occupation but also on ideological colonialism, Russian literature often experienced similar restrictions and censorship. It is of interest, therefore, to see how the presence of "otherness" is manifested in similar and different ways within the literature of the imperial nation.

Moreover, not the least important factor for the choice of these literatures was my fluency in all three languages and ability to work with the original texts. In the selection of authors and texts, whenever possible, I tried to give preference to those that, while being representative of the discussed problems, have been less exposed to scholarly attention.

Methodology

1) *Comparative*. This study includes different aspects of comparative analysis, the most basic of which being the examination of three different literatures that display both commonality of cultural and socio-political contexts and differences engendered by their respective cultural/literary histories and positioning within the imperial structure. Some argue that the region of Central and Eastern Europe as a geopoltical body inherently involves the problematics attributed to the discipline – irrespective of the historical period:

> the region is intuitively "comparative." In Eastern Europe, one town would commonly speak several native languages, belong to two or three empires in the course of a single generation, and assume most of its residents to be hybrids who carried the dividing-lines of nationality within their selves. ... Exile, displacement, multi-languagedness, heteroglossia, outsideness to oneself and thus a taste for irony, the constant crossing of borders and the absence of a tranquil, organic, homogenized center that belongs to you alone: all these Bakhtinian virtues and

> prerequisites for genuine dialogue have long been endemic to Central Europe. (Emerson 2004, 1)

At the same time, the comparative basis of this study is broader than that. The analysis will involve a dialogue with the Western canon of postmodernism, as well as the existing theory and scholarship on this subject. The purpose of the study is not an analysis of the literatures in question as a self-sufficient exercise, but rather an examination of their relation to international literary processes, specifically international postmodernism, and conceptualization of the nature of this relation both in the West and in the domestic academic communities.

2) *socio-political theories of "center" and "periphery" relations*. Today's "center/periphery" approach is based in an earlier "world systems" theory in political science, whose primary exponent was Immanuel Wallerstein, as well as the "polysystems" theory associated with Itamar Even-Zohar's works.[6] Although both were popular during the 1980s (and even earlier, as in the case of Wallerstein) and, in the age of post-structuralism, carried a touch of stigma associated with systemic approaches, today the "center - periphery" approach experiences a very strong come-back, as it has shifted from the area of political analysis to that of cultural studies, literary studies, and, in particular, comparative studies. Thus, for example, some argue that the traditional

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[6] For an overview of the "world systems" theory, see Wallerstein 1974, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1995, 1999; Hopkins et al. 1982, Chase-Dunn 1998; for the polysystem theory, see Even-Zohar 1978, 1979a, 1979b, also 1997; also, for a very useful overview of the posystem theory from a historical and an international perspectives, and an extensive bibliography, see Dimić and Garstin.

polysystem theory acquires a new significance in the context of the "systemic disruption" of postmodernity:

> The multicentered, functionalist approach of polysystem theory can help us rethink the postmodern project, moving beyond the earlier critical emphasis on the disruptive function of postmodern practices, to a more balanced view that takes into account postmodernism's effort to reintegrate excluded voices and cultural peripheries. We could thus argue that postmodernism employs strategies of systemic disruption (framebreaking, decentering, fragmentation) as part of a larger transformative agenda that converts closed, hierarchized systems into dynamic polysystems. (Cornis-Pope 1997, 28-29)

Another important development that is clearly observed in this process is the gradual merging of the theories of peripherality (as tackled, to a various degree, by the above approaches) with the evolving area of postcolonial studies. Thus, today's "rethinking of the categories of center and marginality" brings into focus their proximity to "the philosophies of postcolonial criticism" (ib., 45).

It is noteworthy that the most recent publications in the area of theory of comparative literature emphasize the importance of these approaches for the 21st-century comparative literary studies. In one of the more significant recent contributions, *What Is World Literature?* (2003), Damrosch discusses the role of these theories for today's world literature studies (25-28). In *Debating World Literature* (2004), the editorial article points out the impact that "world system" and peripherality theories had and continue to have on today's comparative scholarship (Prendergast 2004b, 4 and onwards; see also Casanova

1999, Moretti 2004a). Chapter 1 of my study offers a more detailed discussion of this problem.

Structure

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the further discussion of the theoretical issues mentioned in the introduction. In particular, I am taking a closer look at the problem of peripherality in the context of Central and Eastern Europe and its relation to the reception and processing of literary postmodernism. Among other issues discussed is the correlation between the theories of peripherality and the postcolonial studies and the applicability of the condition of postcoloniality to the societies/cultures in question. The chapter also deals with the review of scholarship on international postmodernism and Central and East European postmodernism in particular.

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the examination of particular literary works. Chapter 2 focuses on the representative postmodernist texts written during the totalitarian period (1960s-80s) and the way postmodernist aesthetic responded to and was actualized within the totalitarian ideological structures. Chapter 3 discusses the "second-wave" postmodernism of the post-totalitarian period (1990s – present) and some of the differences that demarcate the first and the second stages of postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe as impacted by different socio-political contexts. The conclusion summarizes the main points of this study and offers suggestions for future research. It is to the exploration of theoretical concerns that we now turn.

CHAPTER I

Theorizing the Problem

Geopolitical Issues of European Peripheries

The recent changes in the European community[7] brought about the ever more frequent evocation of the concepts of transnationalism and transculturation – and just as many meditations on the issue of borders and regionality. In his introduction to the special topical cluster "Literature and the Idea of Europe" in *PMLA* (1993), Timothy J. Reiss suggests that "the very idea of Europe falls ambiguously between the exclusive and the inclusive" and that "'Europe' has always foundered over its identity and its relation with others" (19), with its history being fraught with "conflict over national and international identity, individualism and community, sovereignty and collectivity" (ibid.). Jacques Derrida, reflecting on the idea of the "new" Europe and the ever-going construction of European myth ("a certain Europe [that] does not yet exist") argues that "there is no self-relation, no relation to oneself, no identification with oneself, without culture, but a culture of oneself *as* a culture *of* the other, a culture of the double genitive and of the *difference to oneself*" (1993, 90, emphasis in the original). Europe is simultaneously present and absent, a mere "paleonymic appellation" (ibid., 93), whose borders are not given – no more than its name, and whose identity takes shape both through the difference with the Other (traditionally conceptualized in the context of the East-West dichotomy) and the inevitable otherness inherent in Europe itself. At the more recent international interdisciplinary symposium "Re-Imaging the European Union: Dynamics of Enlargement in the 21st century," which took place on March 1-2, 2002 at the University of Alberta,[8] the central issue was the emergence and expansion of the political and economic body conceptualized as European Union and the effect of this phenomenon on the restructuring of the power relations within the present equilibrium. For an uninvolved listener it was interesting to observe that some of the key concepts that resounded in most of the presentations were geopolitical issues of center vs. margin/periphery, marginalization vs. movement toward the centre, as well as the concepts of belonging and identity. And, among the talks of unity, some of the concerns raised were related -- explicitly or implicitly -- to the issues of centre, the "centrality" of centre, periphery, the process of peripherilization, and the relativity of these hierarchizing notions in an increasingly more complex structure of the geopolitical unity that is called Europe (see Ettmayer, Lee, Verdun, Raworth). A series of international interdisciplinary symposia on Central and Eastern Europe, previously sponsored by the Universities of

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[7] By referring to the recent changes I mean primarily the last two decades or so: the collapse of the East European bloc, emergence of European Union, and its further expansion (at the moment of finalizing the manuscript of this chapter in June 2004, 13 more countries were admitted to the Union). It should be acknowledged, however, that although European Union came into existence as a result of the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the drive towards various forms of European unity has a much longer history; it has become particularly pronounced since the 1950s (the Schuman Declaration of 1950 and European Coal and Steel Community, attempts to create such organizations as European Defence Community and European Political Community, and the emergence of European Economic Community, among others).

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[8] The symposium was co-sponsored by Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development (Ottawa), Canadian Centre for Austrian and Central European Studies, Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies and Department of Political Science (University of Alberta), with the support (and respective representation) of the Embassies of Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Delegation of the European Commission.

California, Berkeley, and London, more recently by the University of Warsaw (November 2004), and next year to be held at the University College, London (February 2006), is equally concerned with the issues of coreness and peripherality, the political and cultural hierarchization of the region and the negotiating the place of Central and Eastern Europe in the larger European paradigm.[9] Re-imaging and re-figuring of Europe has emerged prominently in the recent decade to encompass all areas of academic discourse in the humanities and social sciences.

The geopolitical body of Europe has been long viewed as a more coherent and unified entity than in fact it ever was. Ironically, it was the emergence of the discourse of postcolonial studies that inadvertently contributed to the formulation of this unity through the conceptualization of European imperial otherness. This homogenization of Europe was brought about by

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[9] Last year's symposium was organized under the umbrella topic "Beyond 'Core' and 'Periphery': Towards a New Understanding of Central Eastern Europe." Although the title itself seems to be challenging the persistence of the core/periphery designation in the context of Central and Eastern Europe, the scope of areas suggested for panels and talks – both in the social sciences and humanities – inevitably involves the issues of the dynamics of this dichotomy (see http://www.sns.edu.pl/sympozjum/). Next year's meeting will be structured around the theme of "Inclusion and Exclusion," and, according to the organizers, the rationale of the conference is defined in the following way: "The boundaries of Central and Eastern Europe have been constantly contested from within and without and continue to shift and evolve in the wake of the fall of communism. This perpetual change is reflected through the redefinitions and realignments of identities within the region. The challenge of the expansion of the European Union in the new century represents a key factor in the ongoing processes of regional realignment. Every aspect of identity within the new members, the old' EU countries, the candidate states, as well as the regions excluded from the process has to be reasserted in the face of these dynamics. At the heart of this evolving process of redefinition or reassertion lie the notions of 'exclusion' and 'inclusion.' These concepts inform current debates at all levels of European society..." ("Inclusion/Exclusion" n.p.).

> ... the way in which the political and disciplinary collisions between the Eurocentric premises of traditional comparative approaches to literary and cultural study and the inherently and necessarily anti-Eurocentric stance of postcolonial politics and theory appear to have colluded towards a subtle yet unmistakable reinforcement of a monolithic and monologic "European" identity, in which the ideal notion of "Europe as Subject" [Spivak 271], devoid of historical and geopolitical determinants of its own, is mirrored by the oppositional construct of Europe as Object, a staunchly self-identical metropolitan Other to the richly fragmented (post)colonial Self. (Klobucka 126)

It is the significant evolution of the postcolonial studies together with the radical restructuring of Europe at the end of the 1980s - beginning of the 1990s (among other developments) brought about by the collapse of the Soviet bloc that brought into focus the perpetual movement of the shifting European borders through continuous power play and the revision of the concept of "monologism" of European identity.

In the context of these changes – both in the socio-economical reality and in scholarship – the geopolitical space occupied by the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc emerges as one of the key areas of interest. Although the multiplicity of definitions and designations merely prove its being a cultural and political construct with many faces, the way this region has been conceptualized in the twentieth century or even during the last decade is an issue that has much deeper roots than its popular mass media imaging, particularly during the times of the Cold War. This issue also assumes more significant implications as it involves other related issues such as interpretation of cultural phenomena and workings of cultural/literary systematics.

In his substantive pioneering study *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994), Larry Wolff attempts – and rather convincingly – to trace the etiology of Eastern European Orientalism. In the Renaissance the fundamental conceptual division of Europe was between the South and the North, and it was only later, during the period of Enlightenment that the invention of Eastern Europe as the complementary other started (4-7). The distinction was not a natural one, primarily because "it was produced as a work of cultural creation, of intellectual artifice, of ideological self-interest and self-promotion" (4). It was during that period that intellectual centers in Western Europe appropriated the new concept of "civilization" as a standard measurement of "cultured-ness." It was also at that time that a conceptual reorientation of Europe from West to East was perpetrated. For (Western) Europe the significance of Enlightenment constituted a necessity of self-definition, of conceptualization of one's uniqueness (and superiority) versus multiple others. The invention of Eastern Europe was a necessary development in the construction of a binary opposition within a broader European context. At the same time, however, it constituted not an "absolute" other, but a mediating step in a complex hierarchy of power relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world. "Eastern Europe was located not at the antipode of civilization, not down in the depths of barbarism, but rather on the development scale that measured the distance between civilization and barbarism. ...

Eastern Europe was essentially in-between..." (13).[10] Wolff resorts to diaries, travelogues and epistolary documents of many historically significant political and cultural figures (e.g., Rabelais, Olearius, Voltaire, de Ségur, Coxe, Archetti, Lessing, Casanova, Rousseau, Napoleon, to name just a few) to demonstrate how the complex modern construct of Eastern Europe evolved. To succinctly summarize the western conceptualization of these cultures one may quote Balzac, who was personally interested in the region in question (having been romantically involved with a Polish woman who had an estate in the area that now is the territory of Ukraine): "The inhabitants of the Ukraine, Russia, the plains of the Danube, in short the Slav people, are a link between Europe and Asia, between civilization and barbarism" (*Comédie humaine*, *Cousin Bette*, 229-30, cited in Wolff 13).[11] Wolff's central thesis is that, as in the study of the Orient, in the study of Eastern Europe, there was "intellectual mastery, integrating knowledge and power, perpetrating domination and subordination" (8). Eastern Europe defined Western Europe by contrast, as the Orient defined the Occident, but also mediated between Europe and the Orient. Wolff stresses that the invention of Eastern Europe "has flourished as an idea of extraordinary potency" since the period of Enlightenment, surviving in our own times, not only reinforced by the rhetoric and realities of the Cold War, but also outliving the collapse of communism, persisting in the "public culture and its mental maps" (4). In this sense, in the framework of "public culture," the concept of Eastern Europe remains amazingly monolith and pervasive.

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[10] The idea of barbarism is certainly not a modern concept and is at least as old as classical Greek civilization (cf. the treatment of this issue in Euripides's *Medea*). For a more detailed discussion of the evolution of the dichotomy of barbarism versus civilization see Pagden (1982, 15-26), Hart (2001, 10, 184-87; 2003a, 157-59), also Wolff (285-89, 292-95, 298-305).

[11] Here the illustrious author of *Comédie humaine* and a representative of one of the civilized nations of Western Europe displays some basic – and not uncommon – ignorance, grouping all the "other" under the common umbrella of "the Slav people." The plains of the Danube were populated by Hungarians, Romanians as well as Germans. It is interesting to note that the region that is now traditionally designated as Central Europe was unambiguously treated as part of the Eastern European "other."

In the context of the above, however, it is also of interest to trace the evolution of the concept of "Central Europe," a rather elusive designation, which underwent considerable permutations in the last couple of decades or so. Although it can be argued that the "centrality" as a geographical criterion is an objective point of reference of sorts, the political power play behind the shifting demarcation line between "central" and "eastern" is hard to ignore. The original concept of *Mitteleuropa* was a creation of the eighteenth century and was associated with the rise of German economic and political power in its opposition to France and later – in the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century – with Austrian/German interests in Europe.[12] The designation of Central Europe started to undergo a major shift in the post-Cold War period. The formation of the Soviet bloc solidified the concept of Eastern Europe as embracing more than the purely geographical criterion, adding to it both political and ideological dimensions as well as the implications of economic backwardness. With the warming of the political atmosphere, and later with the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the countries of the (ex)-Soviet bloc turned to the West in a continuous attempt to re-align themselves in the context of Western culture and civilization, with the nostalgic mythologizing of the Austrain-centered Central Europe. Thus, while the early designation of *Mitteleuropa* up to the First World War was clearly associated with German and Austrian interests in Europe, the more recent concept of Central Europe (as differentiated from Eastern Europe) became a mediating designation implicated in the context of the post-WW II Russian hegemonic influences.[13] As aptly summarizd by Szabo, the more recent designation of Central Europe is undoubtedly "a political tool used to emancipate the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc from the eastern/'barbarian' other."[14]

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[12] The first coherent elaboration of the idea of *Mitteleuropa*, however, belongs to Friedrich Naumann, who wanted to see a military alliance between Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1915). Clearly political agenda of this vision is opposed to a different, cultural model of *Mitteleuropa*. Thus, for example, of interest is Hugo von Hofmannsthal's idea of spiritually united, Austria-centered *Mitteleuropa*, based on the presumed uniqueness of the cultural and intellectual atmosphere that flourished in the nineteenth-century Viennese society (see Valdés and Hutcheon).

Postcolonial or Not?

Although in today's world it is clear that "... the colonial relation ... becomes as fundamental to world identities as other 'universal' categories, such as race, and class, and caste, and age, and gender" (Chioni Moore 2001, 124), there is also a concern about how far the very concept of postcoloniality can be stretched and how potentially damaging this can be to the initial project of the (former) colonies to make their voice heard in the movement of the political, economic and cultural opposition to the imperial politics of the West. It can be claimed that such a recontextualization of the very concept to designate any condition of political and other marginality may pose certain dangers to the integrity of the postcolonial studies as a discipline and a method and may lead to"denying its basis in the historical process of [European] colonialism" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995, 2); at the same time, resorting to the same theorists' wording, "the increasingly unfocused use of the term 'post-colonial' over the last ten years to describe an astonishing variety of cultural, economic and political practices" (ibid.) may be a welcome development necessitating from the recognition of the fact that the original designation of colonial/postcolonial is only a part (albeit maybe a core part) of the complex range of political, economic and cultural relationships that result in analogical patterns of social and cultural responses to a range of such socio-historical situations. Thus, placing postcolonial studies in the context of comparative studies and conceptualizing it as an inherent component of today's cultural comparatism, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy conclude that the postcolonial inquiry

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[13] For a more detailed discussion of the concept of Central Europe, see Droz 1960, Kundera 1984, Ash 1989, 1991, Judt 1991, Rupnik 1988 (3-23), 1991, Tomaszewski 2001, Brix 2001; for a discussion of Eastern Europe, Central/Eastern Europe, and "other" Europe, see Rupnik 1988, Walters 1988, Roskin 1991, Longworth 1992; more generally, on the issue of the geopolitical stratification of Europe, see Graubard 1991, Purchla 2001, Pagden 2002, Berezin and Schain 2003.

[14] Professor Szabo, Director of the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies, University of Alberta, private consultation, June 18, 2002. Although Szabo recognizes the historically developed uniqueness of the cultural and intellectual environment of Central Europe, he nevertheless emphasizes that the post-Soviet impetus towards "centrality" is ideologically driven.

> must be truly comparative if it is to develop, opening itself up to, among others, French, Dutch, Spanish, Belgian, Portuguese, Japanese, Turkish experiences. We must look beyond certain triumphalist discourses of a globalized, Anglophone uniformity in order to understand better the complexity and diversity - linguistic, cultural, political - of the world in which we live. As the rhetoric of empire seems

> increasingly to occupy a prominent place in public discourse, the urgency of such a project becomes ever more apparent.[15] (cited in Apter 2004, n.p.)

Apter argues that this "forward-thinking" idea of a postcolonial comparatism "doubles as a new form of global comparatism" (ibid.).

The issue of how postcolonial the cultures of the countries of ex-Soviet bloc are, and whether this term is applicable to them at all, largely remains the matter of much ambiguity and silence rather than academic debate. The use of the concept of "postcoloniality" is mainly rejected (and resented) by Central and East European scholars, and this phenomenon of itself and by itself is worthy of attention and is discussed in more detail below. It is not my goal here to impose any absolute categorization on the cultures in question but rather to see the potential expedience of this concept as an analytical tool and its ability to highlight and explicate certain aspects of cultural production and the range of responses to the totalitarian and post-totalitarian realities.

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[15] It is interesting to note that this long list of imperial histories/experiences other than "Anglophone" does not mention Russia as one of the leading imperial powers of the last few centuries. It is also noteworthy that, for example, Said, as one of the key theorists in the area of postcolonial studies, had never undertaken the subject of Russia. In his *Culture and Imperialism* he attempts to justify this obvious oversight by the following reasoning: "Russia, however [in comparison to Britain and France], acquired its imperial territories almost exclusively by adjacence. Unlike Britain and France, which jumped thousands of miles beyond their own borders to other continents, Russia moved to swallow whatever land or peoples stood next to its borders, which in the process kept moving farther and farther east and south" (1993, 10, cited in Chioni Moore 2001, 119). The argument is surprising, to say the least. How this makes Russian imperial ventures "less" imperial or how this disqualifies Russia from being included in a study on world imperialism is not entirely clear. For another commentary on Said's exclusion of Russia from his analysis, see Cavanagh 61-62.

It is indisputable that there is certain general consensus about the concept of the condition of "postcoloniality": it has acquired a "canonical" unity and coherence to it, which allows its circulation and applicability in a variety of contexts. Among the characteristic attributes defining postcolonial cultures are the assumptions about "tensions between the desire for autonomy and a history of dependence, between the desire for autochtony and the fact of hybrid, part-colonial origin, between resistance and complicity, and between imitation (or mimicry) and originality" (Chioni Moore 2001, 112). Some of the classic criteria of coloniality include "lack of sovereign power, restrictions on travel, military occupation, lack of convertible specie, a domestic economy ruled by the dominating state, and forced education in the colonizer's tongue" (ibid., 121). That all or most of these criteria are applicable to the states of ex-Soviet bloc is indisputable. That postcolonial critique is notably absent from the inventory of analytical tools in the context of Central and Eastern European cultures is puzzling to say the least.

One of the solitary voices drawing attention to this situation in academia sounded only quite recently in *PMLA* (2001). Chioni Moore, notably not a scholar in the area of East European studies, points out the obvious:

> In view of [these] postcolonial-post-Soviet parallels, two silences are striking. The first is the silence of postcolonial studies today on the subject of the former Soviet sphere. And the second, mirrored silence is the failure of scholars specializing in the formerly Soviet-controlled lands to think of their regions in the useful if by no means perfect postcolonial terms developed by scholars of, say, Indonesia and Gabon. (2001, 115)

Another voice in support of inclusion of Central and Eastern Europe in the postcolonial studies comes from Clare Cavanagh (2003). In her article entitled "Postkolonialna Polska" ("Postcolonial Poland," published in one of the leading critical literary journals in Poland, *Teksty Drugie*), Cavanagh reviews contemporary writing in the area of postcolonial critical inquiry and concludes that favouring the traditional dichotomy of the First vs. Thirld World, while leaving the so-called Second World unjustifiably invisible, reflects a certain bias. Cavannagh's article carries the subtitle "White Spot on the Map of Contemporary Theory," which reflects her position and overall argument that the complex and dynamic geopolitical situation in Poland and generally Central and Eastern Europe legitimately belongs in the context of today's postcolonial studies (61, 71). All of the major critical readers in postcolonial theory published in the last two decades, such as those by Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin (1989), and Williams and Chrisman (1994), are silent on the subject of the former Soviet sphere of influence. Shoshat's (1992) exhaustive essay offers the broadest range of nations in the context of postcoloniality, but fails to include or even mention East European connections.[16]

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[16] One of the exceptions was the publication of a special issue by the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* under the title *Postcolonial Literatures: Theory and Practice* (see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Gunew 1995). The issue includes a whole section on "East Central European Postcolonialities" (805-91), and the following two aspects of this publication are of significance in the context of the present discussion: 1) the focus on "East Central Europe" (or just Central Europe, as many scholars would rather have it), which, by the classical definitions of postcolonialism or postcoloniality is "less postcolonial" than Eastern European states; 2) the contributors included mostly scholars from the region in question rather than from North America. In particular, Poland was represented by two well-known scholars of contemporary literature and culture, Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková and Piotr Fast, whose voices in the context of this topical issue were especially significant.

Elaborating further on his argument, Chioni Moore offers some reasonable explanation of the refusal of East European studies, both in the West and in the regions in question, to recognize postcolonial critique as a useful and productive analytical tool. On the part of postcolonial critics (in the West), "a historical indebtedness to three-worlds theory is one cause of silence" (where the socialist economies constitute the Second world, the very term implicitly emphasizing the ambiguity of its status and its in-betweenness); also, the Marxist or leftist inclination of most post-colonial critics makes it awkward for them to negotiate the fact of the historical demise of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe (2001, 117). Chioni Moore's conceptualization of the reasons why the scholars from the post-Soviet world remain silent is of particular interest. The centuries-old East-West division, which absolutizes the dichotomy of non-Europeans versus Europeans, is certainly used to reinforce Central and Eastern Europe's alignment with the Western European "center" or with "European-ness" generally. This alignment implies, among other things, not being on the side of the colonized. Although the military history of modern European nations bears witness to numerous examples of conquest and subjugation (including the Soviet empire), these were conflicts between "civilized" states that never involved the fundamental construct of "civilization" vs. "barbarism." According to Moore, "[b]ecause of this discursive line between the 'East' and 'West', the post-Soviet region's European peoples may be convinced that something radically, even 'racially', differentiates them from the postcolonial Filipinos and Ghanalians, who might otherwise claim to share their situation" (ibid., 117). Acknowledging one's own postcolonial condition, postcolonial cultural trends, postcolonial mentality etc. would thus go counter to the instinctive suppression of the socially and culturally constructed feeling of inferiority on the part of these communities in the larger context of Europe. According to Chioni Moore's argument, the second factor that impedes the possibility to view the post-Soviet situation from the postcolonial perspective is, indeed, the region's condition of postcoloniality, which manifests itself in a number of cultural patterns. "As many colonization theorists have argued, one result of extended subjugation is compensatory behavior by the subject peoples. One manifestation of this behavior is an exaggerated desire for authentic sources, generally a mythic set of heroic, purer ancestors..." (ibid., 118). Another such expression is unconscious desire to model itself after the master culture. The situation, however, is much more complex in the post-Soviet space, where the concept of the master culture has always had a dual face: that of the immediate colonizer on one hand (Russian within the geopolitical space of former Soviet Union, and generally "Soviet" beyond its borders) and the looming proximity of the Western master culture on the other (the latter in the sense of both West European and North American cultures). There certainly has never been an authentic yearning for being part of Russian/Soviet cultural paradigm[17]: "post-colonial desire from Riga [Latvia] to Almaty [Kazakhstan] fixates not on the fallen master Russia but on the glittering Euramerican MTV-and-Coca-Cola beast that broke it" (Chioni Moore 2001, 118). The creation by

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[17] The situation might have been slightly different during the Soviet period. Moscow did play a significant role in the hierarchy of the institution of culture – both within the Soviet Union and in the larger context of the countries of the Soviet bloc. The migration of talent to the current centre – the so-called phenomenon of "brain drain" – both in search of recognition and as a means of boosting one's career was a well-known fact.

Soviet Russia of an alternative European empire drew a distinct geopolitical demarcation line across the continent and produced a pronounced "angst of separation" from Western Europe. The collapse of the Soviet bloc was celebrated by the former Central and Eastern European member countries primarily as a reclamation of Europe – and "Western-ness" – and regaining of what was viewed as their legitimate status within the complex structure of European geopolitical hierarchy. Coming into prominence of the designation of Central Europe that has been witnessed since the 1990s is one of the more visible manifestations of the desire to emphasize the "belonging" and spiritual and cultural affiliation with its Western neighbour.

A similar process of negotiation of geopolitical identity is also characteristic of the Russian cultural space. Russia's ambiguous and unclassifiable geopolitical position between East and West that had been prominently in question for several hundred years even before the twentieth century's radical political reshaping of Europe has not changed during the last half of the twentieth century or even after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Thus, Chioni Moore comments on the "occidentocentric, even colonized mindset" he encountered during his trip to Russia:

> [St. Petersburg] is glorified as either Russia's Amsterdam or its Venice, and Peterhof its Versailles. Buildings are noted for their Italian or French architects, and restoration of the city's fine library was deemed crucial since it held manuscripts not by the likes of Dostoevsky or Pushkin, but Diderot and Voltaire. (1997, 321)

Chioni Moore emphasizes that this "exocentricity," "West-directed other-identification," and "part-denial of self" is typical of the post-colonial condition (ibid.). Apart from the historical ambivalence of the geopolitical status of the region under discussion, decades of totalitarian socialist regime had a crucial impact on identity and created a different niche, that of "East European-ness," in the hierarchy of European geopolitics not only for Russia, but for the former Soviet republics and satellite states as well. Recognition of the enormous complexity of the "shifting, gradated eastern-western European border, especially as regards post-Soviet postcoloniality" (Chioni Moore 2001, 122) provides a useful critical tool for approaching cultural phenomena in this region, as well as their reception in the West.

Although in the context of the discussion of postcoloniality, our interest in Russia may seem slightly out of place, Russian culture does, in fact, manifest some of the telling characteristics of dealing with the imperial/post-imperial cultural and political contexts, albeit from a different perspective. The long ignored fact that the colonizer/imperial agent is also a participant – even if unwitting – in the complex process of disintegration of the historical structure of colonialism and the allied ideological structures is increasingly more often acknowledged in postcolonial studies:

> ... the crisis of postcolonialism is not just a crisis for those who bore the burden of imperialism: who have seen the destruction of their modes of production, the de-privileging of their language and the mutilation of their culture. It is also a crisis for those who have been agents of colonialism and, who, once colonialism itself

> has lost its legitimacy, find themselves without strong ethical and ideological support. (During 370)

Thus, viewed as a centre of a former empire, Russia certainly fits the context of the post-imperial model within the disciplinary framework of postcolonial studies. However, Russia's imperial self-articulation on one side and imperial/ post-imperial angst on the other constitutes only one aspect of this culture's positioning itself in the broader geopolitical context; the other aspect is its simultaneous and paradoxical "centered-ness" (as an imperial agent) and "decentered-ness" (as a mediating space between Europe and Asia, West and East). This condition of marginality certainly describes the status of not only Russia, but also other Eastern and Central European states, as discussed earlier. Thus, "... while many of the historically occurring cultural and political phenomena of the European periphery parallel those manifest in the cultures and societies of former European colonies, the paradigms of colonial and postcolonial development offer an analytical tool that is only partially adequate (and, on occasion, patently inadequate) to describing their 'semiperipheral' specificity" [e.g., Poland-Lithuania; Austria-Hungary etc.] (Klobucka 127). In the case of the countries of former Soviet influence, possible relevance of the model of postcolonial/post-imperial space goes together with a potential applicability of another, broader model – that of peripherality.

Postcoloniality vs. Peripherality

The model that can be found useful in the conceptualization of the structures of power and domination both in the socio-economic and cultural sphere is that of the core and peripheral development that became influential in economic and political discourse and is certainly useful in approaching cultural phenomena. Originally the dichotomy of core (or center) and periphery started to get commonly used in its "current connotation" by Raul Prebisch and his associates in the early days of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in the 1950s (see Hopkins et al. 19). Later in the 1970s these concepts became and integral part of the "world-system" perspective, most fully and comprehensively advanced by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1979) and continuing to remain one of the more important critical tools in the sphere of political science, economics and anthropology.[18] Although Wallerstein's seminal early works deal with the economic and political analysis of the historical evolution of the concepts and conditions of coreness and peripherality, the potential implications of such an analysis extend beyond the immediate context of political science. What is more relevant in the context of the present study is that today's scholars of this approach acknowledge that – apart from economic and political aspects – there is a third "fundamental," "integral" aspect to the world-historical development, which is a cultural aspect and which concerns itself with a multiplicity of interrelated (and often overlapping) cultural communities: language communities, religious communities, ethnic communities, scientific communities and so forth (Hopkins et al. 43). Although "the formation and disintegration of cultural communities do form a fundamental set of processes in their own right" (ibid.), what constitutes the focus of particular interest is how these communities interrelate and correlate in the context of the continuous power play within the "core-periphery" continuum and to what extent their development is conditioned by this context. It is the core-periphery *relation* that becomes a "major focus of attention" and "itself is central" (ibid., 20) to the development of cultural communities and to the analysis of trends and patterns (ibid., 46) that evolve as a result of the distribution of the geopolitical power at any given time in history.

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[18] For an overview of the world-systems and core-periphery theory in political science and economics, see Wallerstein 1974, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1995, 1999; Chase-Dunn 1988, 1998, Hopkins et al., 1982, Hopkins 1982, Chirot and Hall 1982, Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993; in anthropology, Ortner 1984, 141-44, Appadurai 1986, Hannerz 1992; in cultural studies (the term is used here in the context of "a study of cultures" rather than in the context of a disciplinary area that took shape a little later), Geertz 1973.

Although essentially structuralist and Marxist at its core, systemic view of the world organization at the same time cannot help stepping beyond the inevitable limitations of both perspectives. Particularly noteworthy within the world-system analysis itself is the acknowledgment of the inadequacy of the rigid binarism of the core-periphery structure. What shifts to the focus of world-system analysis is the relative and relational character of the concepts of "coreness" and "peripherality." Although the relational character of its elements constitutes the key definitional characteristic of any binary (one element can only be given meaning and definition in the context of its opposition to the other element), in the world-system analysis relational character of the main elements is also manifested in a more complex gradation and stratification of the levels of geopolitical influence. Thus, Wallertsein recognizes that at any given time world system is composed by "multiple layers of coreness and peripherality" (1982, 92), and core processes and periphery processes "are constantly relocated" in the course of development (Hopkins et al. 46). Thus, although various geopolitical and cultural communities may be conveniently categorized as peripheries in relation to the major global center(s), they may also function as "core" regions/communities with regard to other peripheries and can be more appropriately analyzed in the context of the concept of "semiperiphery." Although the concept of semiperipheral development is an inevitable extension of core-periphery binary and necessarily reflects the complexity of the geopolitical world structure, it is also becoming a distinct category in its own right. Thus, both on a global scale and in the context of smaller, regional systems, some communities "are clearly 'in-between' in the core-periphery structure, in that they house within their borders ... both peripheral processes in relation to core states and core-like processes in relation to adjacent peripheral states" (Hopkins et al. 47).

The recognition of Europe as a complex non-homogenous geopolitical body necessarily leads to the realization of the fact that, apart from Europe's centuries long construction of its "coreness" and today's search for an articulation of a coherent, unified identity (which, in itself, is a search for utopia) in the context of globalization, geopolitical European entity also manifests a complex layeredness of hierarchical relations – political, economic and cultural – that in themselves deconstruct the myth of homogeneity. In the realm of cultural production, this implies primarily the cultural processes of integration, assimilation, adaptation, but also those of resistance and of negotiation of cultural spaces, ideologies and identities. Such a geopolitical and geocultural perspective acknowledges

> the shifting and problematic functioning of the notions of center and periphery, major and minor, belonging and exclusion, in the historical development and contemporary mapping of the entity called "Europe," whether it be considered as a cultural community, geopolitical aggregation of societies and nation-states, cartographic image, or the most transcendental of continental signifiers in the symbolic imagining of global reality. (Klobucka 1997, 119)

European margins at the same time differ considerably from other peripheries in the global context in being what may be conceptualized as "central" peripheries. Thus, although viewed as secondary in terms of political, economic and/or cultural influence (which could vary through different historical periods), the various "'peripheral' regions of the subcontinent have nevertheless been able, in different ways and on historically differing occasions, to lay a claim to their rightful communion in a mystique of a global perspective drawn from a Eurocentric viewpoint (the issue of the legitimacy of such a claim being ... a wholly different, eminently disputable matter)" (Klobucka 120). The factors of simultaneous belonging and not belonging, being part of a certain cultural paradigm and being excluded from it, continuously negotiating and appropriating the very concept of Europeanness, in themselves point to the inherent "in-betweenness" of such communities/geopolitical spaces and necessitate to take into account these factors when examining the cultural production and the processing/reception of this culture both within the community and in the broader context – regional or global.

Considering the above, it may prove productive to view Central and Eastern Europe in the context of semiperipheral development. As proposed by Chase-Dunn, some of the extended characteristics of semiperiphery may include the following: 1) a semiperipheral region may be one that mixes within the same area both core and peripheral forms of organization; 2) a semiperipheral region may be spatially located between core and peripheral regions; 3) mediating activities between core and peripheral areas may be carried out there; 4) in addition, a semiperipheral area may be one in which institutional features are in some sense intermediate between those of the relevant core and periphery (1988, 30).[19] Following in his steps, Klobucka further conceptualizes these four characteristics as "hybridization, interposition, mediation and intermediacy" (129).

It can be argued that there is considerable affinity between the postcolonial and core-periphery perspectives, and both may prove productive tools in the analysis of cultural processes in the countries formerly under Soviet influence. Although the condition of postcoloniality undoubtedly has more specific temporal implications (as it is obvious from the very semantics of the prefix "post-") as well as historical ones, it also offers a significant overlap with the core-periphery model; the latter (in particular, in its triadic version, which includes semiperiphery) is by far a more general and comprehensive application, as it reflects the universal characteristics of political, economic, and cultural relationships in any given historical geopolitical system.

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[19] For more discussion of the problems of "core-periphery" relations and the concept of semiperipherality, see Arrighi 1985, Wallerstein 1985, Wellhofer 1989, and Chase-Dunn 1990.

Ideology of Literary Systematics

In the context of the above discussion, it is of interest to have a look at how such concepts as postmodernism and postcoloniality and/or peripherality have been shaping up in relation to conceptualization of the culture of the region in question, as well as affecting its processing and reception. The very debate surrounding the applicability of the concepts of postmodernism and postcoloniality (as a more current and frequently used term compared to peripherality) in the geopolitical context of Central and Eastern Europe is ideologically grounded in the premises outlined above.

It has long been recognized that any cultural formations in fact represent and constitute ideological formations that justify, construct, create and validate any given community's idiosyncrasy and self-identification as a distinct group (in opposition to other groups). An apt concept reflecting the complex symbiosis of the geopolitical and cultural is that of "geoculture," introduced by Wallerstein in his later works: "The idea-system ... is the outcome of our collective historical attempts to come to terms with the contradictions, the ambiguities, the complexities of the socio-political realities of ... [a] particular system" (1991, 166; also see Mac Laughlin). This coming to terms with the socio-political reality in a formation of any historically defined cultural system necessitates negotiation and articulation not only of the group's identity and "self-sufficiency," but also its relational positioning in regards to other groups. In the context of the communities that, within bigger systems, are defined by the relational status of political and economic peripherality, the construction of culture inevitably takes place not only within the community, as originally argued by Wallerstein, but also outside it; any given peripheral culture not only constructs its own space, but is also assigned a place in the context of a bigger system.

The debate surrounding the project of modernity, and, by extension, postmodernity,[20] inevitably involves the discussion of the role that is played by non-European cultures (as well as the role assigned to them) in the discourse of modernity and postmodernity – the issue that will remain outside the scope of the present study. Increasingly more often, however, it is the peripheral states/cultures of Europe itself that draw scholars attention in the context of this debate and in the broader framework of analysis of geopolitics in today's Europe. In particular, among the questions that shape this debate is the issue of how the "de-centered" modernity/postmodernity affects the processes of cultural self-identification and how it writes itself into the broader framework of the core European or generally Western discourse.[21] It is impossible to conceptualize and theorize postmodernism and the pleiad of the related "isms" without taking into consideration a complex power play involved in the discursive game of literary systematics:

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[20] Although postmodernity – more often than not – is viewed as a negation or deconstruction of the ideological and intellectual system of modernity, at the same time it can undoubtedly be conceptualized as an extension of the project of modernity in the context of the idea of a linear progress or movement towards more evolved forms of organization, production etc. Thus, the concept of the postmodern, post-industrial society or society of mass consumption is associated with specific modes of cultural production and distribution. (It should be noted, of course, that the very idea of progressive movement remains a Western notion that originated in the context of Enlightenment and is a fundamentally relational concept.)

[21] It is noteworthy that the concept of European periphery, as addressed in recent scholarship, is by far not limited to the "traditional" periphery of, say, Eastern Europe. Southern, Northern Europe and some states of Western Europe all figure prominently in the academic discourse of the last two decades. One of the more substantive studies undoubtedly belongs to Gregory Jusdanis (*Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature*, 1991), who focused his attention on Greece, one of the paradoxical cases of European history – the cradle of European/Western civilization and one of its present peripheries. Taking the case of Greece, Jusdanis argues that "[p]eripheral societies ... internalize the incongruity between western [core] originals

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and local realities as a structural deficiency. The lack of modernity is seen as a flaw" (xiii). Thus, the construction of modernity is seen as an ideological means of "fitting" into the core Western paradigm. The process, however, is seen by Jusdanis as an inevitable two-way movement: the homogenizing impetus that comes from the core, on the one hand, and the periphery's gravitation pull towards the core, on the other. In another example, *Refiguring Europe*, a special issue of *symplokē* devoted to the problems of "other" Europe (1997), the scope of the concept of European periphery is made quite clear both in the editors' introduction and the very subject matter of the contributions (see Di Leo and Moraru). Apart from the general theoretical essays, three of the six articles dealing with particular nations are devoted to Western European states: Portugal, one of the former powerful European empires and today's culture that is conscious of its own marginality (see Kaufman; also cf. Spain and the Netherlands), Belgium (Spoiden), and Iceland (Eysteinsson). Also, see Fry and Raymond, *The Other Western Europe*, 1980, where the authors attempt to reconsider the concept of conventional Western Europe and focus on the states that arguably constitute the political and cultural peripheries of the geographically defined body of Western Europe. Another interesting example – that of Norway – is discussed by Sabo. The author is posing a question that could be asked about many European countries: "Geographically Norway is a part of the European continent, ... but how 'European' is Norway?" (247). Again, the traditional mythologizing of periphery versus centre easily translates into the dichotomy of nature versus culture, backwardness/ traditionalism versus modernity: "... Norway denotes *lutefisk* and *lefse*, fiddle music and folk dance, mountains and fjords, snow and ref-cheeked skiers in the winter, the midnight sun in the summer. Europe, on the other hand, means metropolitan stylishness, chateaux and fine wine, haute couture and street cafés, gothic cathedrals and artistic masterpieces. Norway goes together with crafts and folktales, Europe with architectural masterpieces and *belles-lettres*" (ibid., 247-48, emphasis in the original). Although it is possible to concede that in cases such as these, certain reconceptualization of the notion of periphery may be taking place, it is also important to recognize that there is a growing acknowledgement of the geocultural processes as one of the fundamental (see Wallerstein 1991) characteristics of the world organization; these processes necessitate continuous renegotiation of identity and cultural space, which is significantly affected by the reception and processing of any given culture in the framework of a larger geocultural system.

> Postcolonialsm and postmodernism are terms whose application involves a politics. From within a particular society, to encourage postcolonial images and texts rather than postmodern ones, or vice-versa, is to point the culture in a particular direction. Such texts and images enter into, and may come to control, the social apparatuses by which history is (re)written, futures projected, other texts evaluated, works published, grants given, collectives, parties and institutions formed – in general, in which cultural political actions occur. (During 371-72)

Although During seems to be more willing to emphasize the impetus from *within* a particular cultural system, the respective movement – "point[ing] the culture in a particular direction" – from outside (that is, from the perspective of the core paradigm) is of equal significance. As Tiffin acknowledges in regard to non-European cultures, "... the power relationships involved in the use of these terms [postcolonialism, postmodernism, poststructuralism] ... the labelling of individual works or national or regional traditions has profound implications for the current and future consideration of the literatures and cultures of countries outside Europe" (170). Although having more immediately obvious relevance for non-European cultures, this statement is also true for any European periphery, where the use of "isms" can be manipulated to negotiate its space within a larger paradigm. Cultural/literary systematics, apart from reflecting the scholarly need for categorization, is also about the power of assigning places and attaching labels in the context of which any given culture is viewed. Whether this systematization comes from centre or periphery (and usually it is a two-way movement), it is about deciding the matters of belonging and exclusion.[22]

Internationalizing / De-centering Postmodernism

The last decade has witnessed a few attempts at withdrawing from a largely Jamesonian model of conceptualizing cultural postmodernism as a historically phenomenon grounded in particular socio-economic conditions. *Liminal Postmodernisms* (1994), edited by Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens, features the subtitle of "The Postmodern, the (Post-)Colonial, and the (Post-)Feminist." The collection emphasizes the shift of focus to different expressions of liminality across borders/nationalities, genders and discourses, where the marginality itself constitutes the inherent postmodern moment. Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema's collaborative editorial project, a substantive study *International*

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[22] Among the more recent studies that display an interest in this problem is Balinska-Ourdeva's dissertation (2003), where she examines the case of Bulgarian and Ukrainian literatures in the period of European modernism. She argues that the literary modernist paradigm was used in these peripheral European cultures as an ideological and political tool to articulate the (belated) modernity of these nation-states in a larger framework of European/Western modernity. In the context of literary systematics also of interest is the case of Icelandic literature (see Eysteinsson). Iceland presents one of the paradoxical cases of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion: traditionally viewed as part of Western Europe, it is at the same time fundamentally alienated from the core cultural processes of the region. The author traces the centuries-long negotiation of the Western literary tradition on the Icelandic ground. Although he acknowledges that Iceland developed a unique route that can be viewed as an alternative to the Western tradition, he, at the same time, cannot overcome the limitations of the traditional systematics. Becoming preoccupied with multiple "-isms" and declaring that Iceland "had its own period of classicism" (157), Eysteinsson. subconsciously emphasizes the importance of this culture's closeness to the Western European model. It is rather ironic that while talking about the persistence of "the domain of maps, mental maps as well as real maps, both of which are semiotic and ideological devices" (155), the author undermines the very critique he undertakes.

Postmodernism: Literary Theory and Practice (1997), is perhaps the first serious attempt to consider a broader context in the analysis of postmodernism, and one that has an immediate relevance for the present study. As noted in one of the reviews, the book is "one of the most comprehensive surveys ... in twentieth-century scholarship" and a truly "comparative literature moment in postmodern studies" (Moraru 1997, 236). Notwithstanding the fact that the collection displays the inevitable pitfalls of the homogenizing Western-centered approach (examining the role of modernity, the interplay between postmodernism and poststructuralism etc.), it at the same time manages to bring together an amazing wealth of material from the non-Western-European and non-North-American context, which in a way subverts the very premises of the editors of this collection. Although the editors insist that it was not their intention to "locate the beginnings of postmodernism exclusively in North America" (adding that, in fact, the very notion of "real beginnings" is "suspect in relation with postmodernism," 297), the articles dealing with the analysis of particular national literatures cover all regions (Canada, Latin America, Western and other parts of Europe, including Central and Eastern, Africa and Asia) with the exclusion of the United States, implicating it as the "source" culture. It is also noteworthy that this section is entitled "Reception and Processing of Postmodernism," thus categorizing all non-American literary postmodernism as a phenomenon of a secondary nature, something borrowed and assimilated on a local ground. Continuing in this self-contradictory mode, Bertens and Fokkema emphasize that although the term itself came into literary use in America (see Calinescu 297), one must distinguish between the critical term and the literary phenomenon (297). The latter observation is one important premise that is most often overlooked in the scholarship on postmodernism. Undoubtedly, popularization of the very term happened on the American ground in the late 1960s and in the 1970s and was initially connected to a rather small group of writers – John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon, and Kurt Vonnegut among others. Stepping beyond the context of the critical *construction* of the very term and the early canon of literary postmodernism, one will find that American postmodernism of the 1960s and 1970s is not only chronologically matched by similar works in other literatures (primarily those in Europe, although not exclusively so), but is also preceded by earlier sources as diverse as Borges, Nabokov and Beckett, to name a few – the sources that were acknowledged by American writers themselves (cf. Barth's analysis of Borges; 1969, 269-79). Although the editors of the discussed collection recognize this fact – and produce several lists of postmodernist works that clearly support the idea of chronological simultaneity of the postmodernist impetus across different national literatures (see Fokkema 1997, 28-29), the overall organization of the material, as discussed above, does not bear out the argument.

Bertens and Fokkema propose that there are at least two considerations in support of the concept of international postmodernism (298-99). The first one – the one that constitutes one of the premises of the present study – can be tentatively designated as epistemological. It can be argued that some time in the course of the twentieth century – some would prefer to speak of the post-World-War-II period while others would go further back to the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century with its first radical attempts to deconstruct the established systems of knowledge and their foundational binaries (cf. Nietzsche and Freud among the key figures) – a qualitative change occurred in the way we perceive the world and think of ourselves in this world, this change not being necessarily restricted to the Western world or the core countries of the Western world. This new *épistème* is varyingly conceptualized in the critical discourse as post-Enlightenment, post-cognitive – or postmodern. Different reception and processing of our reality inevitably entails its different representation in the arts, or, as Bertens and Fokkema argue, "radical changes in social reality or in a culture's knowledge of reality call for new literary means of expression" (299). The second factor emphasizes the role of literary influences: intertextuality in the broadest sense and Bakhtinian dialogism as an inherent condition of all discursive practices and knowledge itself, which negates the very possibility of originality and definitive sources. In itself, the issue of influences (or, on the other hand, analogies) is a very interesting and still relatively unresearched problem that, although remaining beyond the scope of the present study, has direct relevance to the discussion of the core-periphery processes. If designating postmodernist cultural/literary production in peripheral cultures necessarily implies a phenomenon of second order (hence non-original or borrowed/imported), it may be successfully argued that American postmodernist canon is just as secondary in terms of its indebtedness to Latin American and European influences (e.g., the tradition of European historical avant-garde).

Accepting the concept of international postmodernism also means accepting the possibility of a different etiology resulting from different socio-political and economic conditions. In particular, resistance to the idea of postmodernist cultural production in the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc – both in Western and Central and East European scholarship – stems from the double marginalization of the region: historically, through the long-term peripheralization of Eastern Europe as opposed to its Western counterpart throughout modern European history; and politically, through the developments of the twentieth century, when the West-East dichotomy was further reinforced. Thus, the "western-ness" arguably inherent in the very phenomenon of postmodernism contradicts the very "non-western" attributes associated with the region. Some scholars of postmodernism, however, are already willing to consider a different perspective: "historians in the future may place much more weight on the events comprising the decline of socialism in Russia and Eastern Europe – events generally overlooked in the saga of postmodernism – than on the proliferation of Disneylands, once they are able to examine the present moment in the light of its future at a sufficient temporal remove" (Carroll 102). Arguably, we may already have the advantage of a "sufficient temporal remove" that can allow us to evaluate the developments in these countries in the larger framework of the twentieth century.

The debate on international postmodernism (or internationalizing of postmodernism?) inevitably invites the question of the correlation of the postmodern versus postcolonial or peripheral. In this context, the latter two terms can certainly be interchangeable, since both designate certain centripetal (towards-the-centre) forces and processes (search for identity, increased desire for self-articulation, etc.) that clash with the centrifugal (away-from-the-centre) impetus inherent in postmodernism. It is perhaps apt to repeat the question that has been asked so many times in the debate opened by the theorists of postcolonial studies: does global postmodernism necessarily entail homogenization and should it be viewed as a neo-imperial expansion? Does it impede/suppress idiosyncratic cultural self-expression? For sure, the true scale and impact of this problem on the global development can be better evaluated retrospectively, that is from a more significant "temporal remove." In the process of further analysis, however, both here and in Chapters 2 and 3, we will try to approach some aspects of this debate.

Conceptualizing Postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe

Any discussion of postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe must not only differentiate between the term as a critical construct and the literary phenomenon that may emerge independently from such a construct (see Fokkema above), but also between the concept of postmodernity as a socio-political and economic reality and postmodernism as a set of cultural practices.[23] At the risk of reiterating unnecessarily some well-established theoretical maxims, it should be noted that most of the philosophical/ sociological theories used in literary studies are concerned primarily with the concept of *postmodernity*. Jameson's model of postmodernity as a late-capitalism stage in the development of (Western) society obviously precludes the applicability of this concept in the context of other socio-economic conditions. Lyotard's proposal of the

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[23] See Linda Hutcheon's more detailed discussion of the common confusion of the concepts of "postmodernism" and "postmodernity" and the necessity to differentiate between the two (1989, 23-29).

"postmodern condition" is less specific and concerns itself with circulation, processing and legitimation of knowledge, although undoubtedly it can be argued that these processes are ultimately based in a particular mode of production of knowledge (and hence in particular socio-economic conditions). Lyotardian de-legitimation of *grands récits* at the same time also signifies an important epistemological shift, one that may be conceptualized outside the immediate context of the socio-economic reality. Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation, although ultimately linked to the emergence of the consumer society, concerns itself with processing of reality and supplanting of reality with the sign (which masks the absence of reality by foregrounding the very act of substitution; see Baudrillard, esp. 169-87). Baudrillard's simulacrum is both historical and meta-historical. Some key scholars of literary postmodernism, however, seem to have a much broader view of what constitutes the essence of postmodernity, particularly in its relevance to cultural/literary production. Thus, Bertens and Fokkema suggest that if anything is significant in an attempt to define today's society, it is "the continuing processes of secularization, decolonization and democratization" together with the ever increasing role of electronic media as a means of both production and circulation of knowledge (299). At the other end of the spectrum, postmodernity (and postmodernism) is linked to a radical questioning and reevaluation of the systems of thought associated with the project of Enlightenment. Although this approach at some point overlaps with all currently prominent theories of the postmodern, it at the same time offers a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, particularly in the area of literary practice.[24] Another point of relevance is that if the condition referred to as postmodern may be informed not only by the socio-economic context, but also (and possibly even more so) by a certain epistemological shift on a broader scale, this factor lessens the importance of the particular geopolitical context as a precondition for this cultural/literary development.

Although the presence of postmodernist models in the literatures of Central and Eastern Europe is no longer a matter of debate, writing them into the larger framework of (Western? global?) literary systematics remains to be largely outside the sphere of interest in Western critical discourse, including the area of East European studies.[25] Equally noticeable is the similar gap in the scholarship of the countries in question, where the local forms of postmodernism are usually conceptualized as a self-sufficient phenomenon without taking into consideration the broader context of its relationship with the similar developments elsewhere. This situation reflects, to a certain degree, the difficulties inherent in approaching the region in question, and, in particular, the literary practice of the totalitarian period.

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[24] Cf. the "postcognitive" stage in the development of the twentieth-century art by Dick Higgins (1978) and the ontological dominant proposed by Brian McHale (1987). Commenting on the significance of this epistemological shift across cultures and continents, McHale says that "[t]he logic of literary history brought writers in various cities – cities in Europe and Latin America as well as in North America –to a crosswalk... The streets were different, but the *crossing* was the same" (11, emphasis in the original). Echoing him, Fokkema states that many literary traditions – other than North American – "found similar answers to the changing socio-historical conditions and the demise of international modernism" (1997, 27).

[25] The obvious exception is the afore-mentioned *International Postmodernism* (Bertens and Fokkema) and also *Postmodernist Fiction in Europe and the Americas* (D'haen and Bertens 1988; see, in particular, Krysinski 1988). None of the major North American or European periodicals specializing in East European studies attempted to undertake a more comprehensive look at the problem. This situation is very similar to the way the issue of post-coloniality is marked by the indifference of scholars in the field (cf. Chioni Moore 2001).

The usual chronological approach employed in the classification of Western – primarily American – postmodernism involves differentiation between the early and late stages (1960s-70s and 1980s-90s). The functionality of such an approach seems obvious: it is necessary to distinguish between the moment when a new tradition arises as a reaction to the previous forms of artistic expression and the stage when it becomes established and enters mainstream. In relation to North American and generally Western postmodernism there is also another factor that demarcates the two stages: it is the turning point – roughly at the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s – when postmodernist discourse becomes politicized in response to the growing critique of the platform of "anything goes" and branches out into a variety of sub-discourses that appropriate postmodernist conventions for their own ideological goals. Thus, Fokkema suggests that this political response to the early postmodernism included the emergence of the feminist postmodernist writing, historiographic fiction, postcolonial and autobiographical postmodernist writing, and fiction focusing on cultural identity (1997, 30-33). Linda Hutcheon's earlier (1988, 1989) defence of the political commitment of postmodernism extended even further and went beyond the decade of the 1980s to successfully show that the impetus towards the ironic and revisionist rereadings of historical and socio-political narratives had been an inherent part of the postmodernist project as witnessed in the creative work of many writers both in and outside of the North American context.

The "early/late"chronology proves to be even more functional in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. The two stages in the emergence and development of postmodernism in these literatures, although largely corresponding to their Western counterpart in terms of chronology, are demarcated on a different ground: the gradual decline of the socialist system and the totalitarian/imperial ideology, and the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Therefore the first stage can be conceived of as spanning the period from the 1960s into the mid- or late 1980s (where 1989 is the turning point in the process of disintegration of the empire) and the second, respectively, from the late 1980s - early 1990s until present. Some of the important factors defining the qualitative shift that began around the mid-eighties (the years of "glasnost"and "perestroika") include the end of the strict state censorship, the gradual decline of the role of official meta-narratives, the surge of local nationalisms and the rise of the movements for independence in the non-Russian regions of the union, the liberation of the arts from the officially inscribed models of expression, and increasing exposure to the West and Western intellectual heritage of the twentieth century (more importantly, translation, and hence greater accessibility, of the works of contemporary philosophy, critical theory in the area of the humanities and social sciences, etc.). [26]

Although the overall chronology of the development of the early/late stages of postmodernism in the West and in Central and Eastern Europe may seem largely parallel, there are some qualitative differences in the type of the literature produced and its function. If we are to agree with the premise of "anything goes" or the self-sufficiency of play as the defining moment in early postmodernism (cf. Fokkema above; this, in my opinion, remains disputable) – or, at least, if we concede that early postmodernist literature in the West was less conscious of socio-political issues – then, by comparison, its Central and East European counterpart was a lot more politicized; if this politicization did not always happen on the explicit (say, thematic) level, it certainly can be conceptualized in the broader context of artistic dissent and a production of the discourse of opposition and resistance to the official meta-narratives. Also, if we extend our understanding of political involvement from the concerns with the matters of immediate socio-political reality to the general concerns of the modern humankind, then the influence of European existentialism and, generally, existential preoccupations can be considered as an important part of the world view represented by the literature of the period. Similarly, commenting on the differences between North American and European intellectual environments, Bertens and Fokkema observed that "cheerful nihilism" (quoted from Barth 1958, 47) of North America was not very likely to have been a source of inspiration for European writers (301); it was even less likely to have been such for the writers of the totalitarian Central and Eastern Europe.

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[26] Bringing this commentary closer to the immediate context of this study, it should be noted that even in the countries that experienced a lot more rigid political constrictions and censorship, the second half of the eighties constitutes a qualitatively different period (see, for example, Pavlyshyn's [1990] overview of the development of Ukrainian literature during this time).

On the other hand, the second-wave postmodernist literature of the late 1980s and the 1990s, although undoubtedly displaying the same trends of this period as its Western counterpart (i.e. incorporation of the feminist voices, postcolonial/post-totalitarian preoccupation with the issues of history and national identity, experimentation with genres and across genres) becomes a lot more open to postmodernist freeplay and a lot closer to what can be conceptualized as the mainstream postmodern. This development has a manifold etiology: radical changes in socio-political reality that suddenly freed literature from social obligations; conception of the postmodernist play as an ultimate "free," libertarian space that acquires ideological subtexts in the anticipation of the demise of the totalitarian structure ; and, in some cases, an unobstructed access to Western literary models. In particular, the cultures of the totalitarian Eastern Europe (as opposed to Central Europe) did not start experiencing a significant, steady impact of Western literature and Western intellectual ideas until the second half of the 1980s. Notwithstanding the fact that there had always been individual contacts between intellectuals on either side (and these influences cannot be disregarded) and the situation with censorship may have varied from country to country, the comparison of the bigger picture of the literary production before and after the mid 1980s – the beginning of the end of the empire – shows a significant influence of Western poststructuralist philosophy.

The First/Early Stage (1960s - 1980s)

One of the biggest misconceptions about the literature of the Soviet period that had been prevalent in the Western scholarship for a long time is its presumed homogeneity within the framework of socialist realism. Although this may be true in particular of the Soviet Union in the period between the 1930s and mid-1950s (the years associated with the Stalinist regime), starting with the period of the so-called "thaw," the monologism of the Soviet culture undergoes some revisions and there is room if not to experiment openly, at least to integrate the official code and work it from within. The voice of dissent art also becomes stronger. The culture of the satellite states, on the other hand, experiences different degrees of impact of totalitarian ideology and censorship, and some of them are significantly less influenced by the imperial structure. Thus, in Poland, for example, the development of socialist realism came to a dead end already by the middle of the 1950s. Notwithstanding the fact that conditions largely varied from country to country, the emergence of local manifestations of early literary postmodernism practically coincided with that in the West. This factor is usually ignored or disqualified by Western scholars while the main emphasis is being placed on the second stage (with the possible exception of a few critical works discussed above). When discussing the etiology of early literary postmodernism in the cultures of the ex-Soviet bloc, it is possible to conceptualize a few contributing factors:

1) It is important to remember that notwithstanding the period of relative socio-political and cultural isolation, Central and Eastern Europe remained part of the larger European paradigm; in the context of the literary development this primarily meant the tradition of modernism and avant-garde. The scholarship on the national literatures of the totalitarian period faces the inevitable question of the degree of connection of the practices that may be designated as postmodernist with the legacy of the historical avant-garde and modernism. This link is sought particularly insistently in the context of the

Western theory of postmodernism as a reaction to or a rereading of the modernist tradition.[27]

In Poland the notion of modernism is associated mainly with the activities of "Mloda Polska" ("Young Poland," 1890 - 1918, according to the chronology of Bolecki 1993), which is claimed to be significantly different from its West European counterpart; hence, some scholars ask, to what degree and in what way can it be related to the emergence of postmodernism (cf. Bolecki 1993, 8)?[28] In the context of Russia and Ukraine, the issue of modernism, the development of which was never brought to completion, acquires a particular significance. Modernism remained an unfulfilled aesthetic project for both Russian and Ukrainian literatures, not only in terms of the unfortunate internal developments (i.e. as a local project) but also in terms of its extreme informational and cultural isolation during the years of the Stalinist regime (i.e. as part of a bigger international phenomenon). Both in Ukraine and Russia the development of modernism was forcefully interrupted at the end of the 1920s (while Western modernism was still vital well into the 1960s) and was never allowed to be brought to its logical conclusion or "exhaustion" of the form.[29] The question that was asked fairly early in the beginning of the discussion of Central and Eastern European postmodernism in the 1990s is whether it is fruitful to speak of a postmodernism that developed on the ground of an incomplete modernist project, and whether what is referred to as a postmodernist phenomenon is not merely a belated continuation of the interrupted modernism (cf. Ilnytzkyj 1995, who articulates this argument in the specific context of Ukrainian literature).

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[27] For some insights into the discussion of the relation of modernity to postmodernity and modernism to postmodernism, see Habermas; Lyotard; Jameson 1984a, 1984b, 1991, 2002; Huyssen; Calinescu; Wilcox; Lodge 125-245; Hutcheon 1989, 23-29; Bertens 1984, 1995; Moraru 2001; Fokkema 1997.

[28] It should be noted that there have been attempts to broaden the meaning of modernism in Polish literary studies (e.g., cf. Możejko's 1998 article "Literary Modernism: Ambiguity of the Term and Dicohotolies of the Movement"). Also see Wyka's (1987) treatise on the phenomenon of Mloda Polska.

Another significant problem is the status of the phenomena of the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde and their correlation with the concept of postmodernism (cf. Dziamski; Lethen; Schulte-Sasse). Various forms of the avant-garde were quite strong and vital in the literatures under discussion, particularly in Russia. The debate has a distinct parallelism with the Western model of the genesis of postmodernism (i.e. continuity/ discontinuity with modernism), in particular, in the European context, where the tradition of the avant-garde was significantly stronger than that in North America. Although it was always common for the avant-garde to demarcate itself from modernism, the academic exclusion of the former from the latter or, alternatively, inclusion, is dictated by a particular way of conceptualizing postmodernism – or even accepting the term itself (see Lethen 234; cf. Graff; Kermode). Inclusion of the avant-garde into the modernist paradigm blurs the distinctiveness of the polarity "modernism versus postmodernism" and vice versa (Lethen ibid.).[30] Hence, some theorists of the avant-garde / neo-avant-garde manifest resistance and oppostion to the very designation of postmodernism, which threatens the autonomy of the concept of avant-garde – something that can often be observed in the criticism of all three literatures in question.

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[29] For a discussion of Ukrainian avant-garde and modernism, see Ilnytzkyj's substantive study of Ukrainian futurism (1997), where he approaches Ukrainian avant-garde as a reaction to early Ukrainian modernism of the 1900s and 1910s. The study provides a useful discussion of the tensions between the modernist and futurist movements in the context of Ukrainian literature. For a more particular discussion of Ukrainian modernism, see Ilnytzkyj 1992 and 1994. Also see Hundorova 1997 and Pavlychko for a detailed historical analysis of the problems of modernism in Ukrainian culture. For a discussion of Russian avant-garde and modernism, see Możejko 1995b, 1998; Roberts, esp. 22-27; for a commentary on the contemporary Polish avant-garde, see Carpenter. On the more general discussion of European avant-garde and the relation between avant-garde, modernism, and modernity, see Krysinski 1985, 1993, 1995, 1999.

Although it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine the issues of modernism and avant-garde in more detail, it will be argued that no matter how idiosyncratic the local manifestations of these phenomena were, their conventions and technical inventory had a direct impact on the future emergence of the postmodernist literary practice. Can an interrupted modernist tradition be picked up and developed further from the perspective of a significant temporal remove? The main premise that will inform my argument is that returning to the earlier modernist platform without a critical, ironic rereading of the paradigm is probably impossible. In this context it is apt to recall Hutcheon's conceptualization of parody as a repetition at a critical distance (1985, 1994b, also 1989, esp. 93-117). According to her, revisiting/recycling of any artistic form or convention involves inevitable authorial "alienation" from this material through the irreversible loss of the immediate context: "postmodern parody does not disregard the context of the past representation it cites, but uses irony to acknowledge the fact that we are inevitably separated from that past today – by time and by subsequent history of those representations" (1989, 94; cf. Eco's loss of innocence through ironic revisiting, 1983, 67). Such a repetition becomes parody – not in the classical sense of ridiculing, but in the sense of the author's distancing from the original material, which will inherently include an ironic perspective.[31] The issue of continuity/discontinuity of the modernist/ postmodernist paradigm (which appears crucial in the scholarship of Central and Eastern Europe) also involves matters other than the modernist aesthetic itself; namely, these are problems of the literary institution and, generally, reception – the problems that remain overlooked more often than not. In this respect, of relevance is McHale's (drawing on Charles Newman) observation that postmodernism reacted not so much against the modernist artistic/literary practices themselves, as against the "second revolution" in criticism and pedagogy that "interpreted, codified, and canonized the aesthetic innovations of the 'first revolution'" (1987, 236-37, n.11; also see Newman 27 and *passim*). Although this factor – institutionalization of modernism – was obviously either absent (in the Soviet Union) or, at best, not particularly significant in the context of the satellite states of the 1940s and 1950s, it can be proposed that a different aesthetic norm served as a point of departure (or, rather, opposition). Thus I will argue that early postmodernist practices in the literatures under discussion were as much utilizing and building on the technical inventory of modernism and (to an equal extent) historical avant-garde, as they were reacting against the inscription of the metanarrative of the totalitarian ideology and the canonization of socialist realism, which brings us to the next point.

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[30] Again, see Możejko 1998 for an alternative point of view.

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[31] Hutcheon, speaking from the perspective of the 1980s, notes that few scholars of postmodernism resort to the concept of parody. Hutcheon believes that the reason for this is the fact that "[the concept of parody] is still tainted with eighteenth-century notions of wit and ridicule. But there is an argument to be made that we should not be restricted to such period-limited definitions of parody and that twentieth-century art forms teach that parody has a wide range of forms and intents – from that witty ridicule to the playfully ludic to the seriously respectful" (1989, 94).

2) The oppositional function of the early literary postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe vis-à-vis the inscribed official code of cultural expression manifests itself both as artistic and social/political dissent. If we agree with the assumption that the break with the intellectual legacy of Enlightenment constituted the most prominent epistemological feature of postmodernism, the latter would be as much a reaction against the imperial self-centeredness and hegemonic drive of Western modernism (in North America, Western Europe as well as its former colonies) as an opposition against the prescribed doctrines of socialist realism and the metanarrative of totalitarianism (in the countries of the ex-Soviet bloc). In this sense both categories – modernism and socialist realism – although seemingly incompatible, present, in fact, phenomena of the same order.[32] On the other hand, quintessential binarism, centrism and structuralism of Marxism present only a smaller, and arguably less significant, aspect of this discourse. In the broader context, the metanarrative of socialism can be conceptualized as one of the last utopian discourses of the Western Enlightenment, and its demise had a profound impact on the devolution of the value system associated with the Western social and

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[32] See also Bauman for his discussion of socialism as a "counter-culture" of modernity (221-22).

epistemological structure, complete with the foundational ideas of reason, progress and human agency within the socio-political space.[33]

A similar treatment of socialist realism has also been noted in East European scholarship; in particular, this concerns its functional affinity with the avant-garde. As one of the prominent Russian critics, Lipovetsky, argues (referring to a certain wider critical consensus on this matter), socialist realism eventually evolved into an aesthetic model, displaying typological characteristics of all-time avant-garde. By the 1960s, when socialist realism became fundamentally discredited and the first serious wave of dissident writing appeared, it "developed to an absurd point such 'generic' features of avant-gardist trends as speculation, aggressive intolerance for aesthetic dissidence, and pretensions to cultural monopolism. Socialist realist mythology also maximally concentrated that pathos for destruction – of the past as well as the actual aesthetic nature of literature...." (1993/1994b, 8).

The conditions for literary development within the totalitarian structure differed significantly across Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, in Poland socialist realism was basically extinct since the middle of the 1950s, which allowed for more freedom of artistic expression (see Możejko 2001). In the Russia of the 1970s they resorted to the inscribed code of the official culture in order to produce a counterculture (sotz-art); in the central cities, such as Moscow and former Leningrad (St. Petersburg), there also existed a legitimized and officially endorsed underground and dissent nucleus, permitted to function within reasonable limits. On the other hand, Ukraine, one of the numerous ethnic peripheries of the Soviet empire, with potentially explosive nationalist and political dissent moods, was never allowed much room for deviation.

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[33] Although the role of socialism in the decline of the epistemology of the Enlightenment remains largely unexamined in today's scholarship, it undoubtedly constitutes one of the more interesting aspects of the problem. As, for example, Bauman writes, "... the communist system was the extremely spectacular dramatization of the Enlightenment message.... [the Soviet experiment] was a much more condensed, much more intense, practical exercise in the Enlightenment ideal of the global order than anywhere else. The collapse of this, was not only the collapse of communism ... it was also more than that: it was a collapse of a certain modern idea of a 'designed society'" (221). It is also possible that conceptualization of such an approach needs a critical perspective of a more significant temporal and historical distance.

The socialist realism's role as either a "modernist" or an "avant-garde" platform from which Central and Eastern European early literary postmodernism had sprung undoubtedly affected its shaping, since the socialist realist base was (at least in part) the secondary material on which the newly emerging aesthetic was based.

3) another premise that is of particular importance in the context of the period of the 1960s-80s is the assumption that in view of the interrupted participation of Central and Eastern European cultures in the larger European/Western paradigm and a relative absence of the homogenizing Western influence, postmodernist impetus was bound to produce a variety of manifestations on the local ground. The possible conception of different postmodernisms was one of the main premises successfully tested in Bertens and Fokkema's cumulative *International Postmodernism* ("the varying literary and cultural conditions in this world are bound to produce endless varieties of postmodernism," ix). All the varieties, while supporting the common paradigm, at the same time display the influences of the local socio-cultural environments. Particular

examples of the Central and Eastern European early literary postmodernism(s) will be examined in Chapter 2.

The Second/Late Stage (1989/Early 1990s – Present)

The post-totalitarian period presents a qualitatively different stage in the further development of the discussed phenomenon. Several observations are in place here:

1) The post-1989 period marked the liberation of the arts from the officially inscribed code and opened the borders – political as well as cultural – to the West. If the pro-Western cultural impetus had always been an important part of negotiation of the status of the mediated territories – both the satellite states and the Soviet republics of the European part of the Soviet Union – between Western Europe and Russia, now it became an explicit ideological tool of cultural re-orientation and geopolitical re-mapping. Postmodernism has been playing not the least important role in this process.

2) Postmodernist/poststructuralist philosophy got extensively popularized while the original and translated works of postmodernist theory and Western postmodernist literature became ever more accessible. These changes witnessed a transition from the early forms of postmodernist literary practice (political, spiritual, existential) of the totalitarian period to a more pronounced self-sufficient play of form. Postmodernist conventions were gradually codified and the postmodernist mainstream emerged. The influence of Western culture and, in particular, Western postmodernism during this period is very significant; at this stage, postmodernism can be conceptualized as a critical

construct and a cultural commodity that, as any commodity, can be borrowed, assimilated and adapted.

3) The “oppositional” function of postmodernism gradually diminished and altogether disappeared.

4) The very institution of literature began to be thought of in a different way as it underwent some considerable changes. The messianic role of literature that had been an important part of the Central and Eastern European cultural paradigm, rapidly declined.

These literary processes as reflected in Central and Eastern European postmodernism of today will be analysed in Chapter 3.

Critical Discourse and Some Aspects of Reception

Western theoretical discourse on Central and Eastern European literary postmodernism is rather scarce and did not manifest any significant interest in the problem until the beginning of the 1990s (with the exception of a few works mentioned earlier in the chapter); in itself it was a response stimulated by the emerging discussion of postmodernism in the literary communities in question rather than an autonomous scholarly impetus. The silence of the earlier scholarship on the subject of the literature of the totalitarian period (with the exception of a few dissident writers well known and well publicized in the West, such as Konwicki or Bitov) can be explained not only by the issue of accessibility to these texts, but also by almost universal discarding of everything that was written under the conditions of socialist realism as a default ideological cliche. Also the idea of a possibility of literary /artistic postmodernism not only in the context of totalitarian cultures, but also in the context of the states of "belated modernity" was never popular.

Compared to the theoretical and critical discourse of postmodernism as a Western phenomenon, which started more than thirty years ago, the similar theoretical/ philosophical exercise in Central and Eastern Europe gained momentum only in the 90s. Being far from a coherent body of critical discourse, it can be generally characterized as: 1) largely secondary to the Western theoretical elaborations of the concept; 2) often purely informational and engaged in popularizing the main thinkers and works associated with postmodernism (cf. Baran, Kuritsyn 1992, 1993/94b, Hundorova 1996, Andrusiv, Denysova, to name just a few); 3) although abundant in analytical dissections of various fictional works from the point of view of particular conventions by now canonized as postmodernist, it is at the same time lacking in efforts to draw coherent theories of postmodernism both generally in the culture/literature of the region of the ex-Soviet bloc, and, more specifically, in national literatures.

Reviewing the debate cannot be complete and objective without the differentiation of two sides/perspectives: 1) that of Western theorists, who, although being at the very roots of the discourse, remain largely "outsiders" to the situation – cultural and other – in the region discussed; and 2) that of the scholars of Central and Eastern Europe – recipients of the theoretical discourse of the West and the "insiders" in the debate. These two sides involve – implicitly or explicitly – various agendas.

Two ways of conceptualization of literary postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe stand out prominently in the critical discussions of the last decade: 1) as a certain cultural commodity that can be imported and artificially imposed upon a national literature; 2) as an inherent development (whether it is an exclusively contemporary or a cyclical phenomenon), which could have been manifested in Central and Eastern Europe as early as the analogous phenomenon in the West, not necessarily linked to the later impact of the theoretical elaboration of the concept of postmodernism. Only a few discussions of postmodernist tendencies/phenomena in the literatures of Central and Eastern Europe as going back to the totalitarian period appear prominent in some scholars' work (cf. Janaszek-Ivaničkova and Fokkema 1995, 1996; Bakuła; Możejko 1995a, 1996; Kuritsyn 2000; Genis; and Lipovetsky 1997, 1999, among others). It should be noted that there is no particular correlation between the two models and the West/East representation in the debate. On the one hand, some Central and Eastern European scholars may be supportive of either idea, driven by the conception of the postmodernist discourse as an inherently pro-Western ideological tool; on the other hand, the post-totalitarian impetus towards the articulation of the national identity and history may inhibit a positive reception of postmodernist literature in the wider critical circles. Among some Western scholars, theorizing postmodernism as a quintessentially Western phenomenon, serves as a basis for rejecting either model, whereas the Slavophilic inclinations of others constitute the framework for the defence of the national essence that can be "contaminated" by Western cultural models.

Thus, for example, rather surprisingly, Caryl Emerson expressed one such argument. Apparently sympathetic to Russian post-totalitarian nostalgia for the old-time spirituality and values, she stated in 1992 that although Russia is postcommunist, it is not postmodernist (here the very use of the term is rather imprecise and ambivalent) -- which Emerson interprets as "a hopeful sign" (368). Referring further to the forum "Posmodernism and Culture" held in the journal *Issues of Philosophy*, Emerson, apparently in support of her own previous statement, quotes the panelists and agrees with them that Russians will inevitably return to a form of realism (369). Although not denying the presence of postmodernism in Russian culture (simply because there is no denying it), Emerson treats it as an alien element, not worthy of a place in Russian culture, which is apparently predestined for the fulfilment of a higher spiritual mission.

This treatment of postmodernism as an exclusively foreign model belongs together with process of construction of mythology of a national identity. A similar approach was discussed earlier by Ilnytzkyj in relation to the present-day Ukrainian culture and literature (1995). Sceptical of an artificial transplantation of postmodernism on Ukrainian ground, he argues that in this case the complex social phenomenon of the postmodern condition is being artificially brought down to a set of formal literary techniques and devices, which not only distorts the interpretational potential of certain aspects of the contemporary literary scene in Ukraine, but also imposes a false model of literary creativity on the Ukrainian literary community.[34] In this case, a possibility of emergence of a national variation of this phenomenon is not entertained. Clearly the basic premise here is the absence of a post-industrial society or the "postmodern condition" as formulated by Lyotard (also cf. Bolecki 1993). Although it is hard to deny the disparity of economic levels in the West versus Ukraine (or Eastern Europe generally), at the same time it would be relevant to evaluate the recent radical changes that occurred in the post-totalitarian countries, the new aspects of mass culture and the general process of commercialization of culture, the condition of contemporary media (TV, radio, film market, means of commercial advertisement), etc., and the effect of these developments on cultural production.

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[34] It must be noted that the author rightly critiques the dilettante and sometimes downright sloppy usage of the term "postmodernism" in Ukrainian literary criticism (this is also true of all Central and Eastern European criticism, particularly in the early 1990s). Here, however, important is the author's stand on the possibility of postmodernist development in Ukrainian culture. For the analogous discussion in Polish criticism, cf. Bolecki's "Polowanie na postmodernistow (w Polsce)" ("Hunting for Postmodernists in Poland," 1999).

Critical conceptualization of postmodernism posits a double challenge with respect to Central and East European literary communities: situating themselves in relation to existing Western theories and conceptualizing/accommodating them in the context of the domestic conditions. Paradoxically, the intricacies of the Western debate did not affect Central and East European critical discourse in a significant way. Although acknowledging the existing controversies, the cumulative accounts of international postmodernist theory by Central and East European scholars tend to search for unity and coherence rather than focus on sometimes opposing points of view. Even though there is no preoccupation with the issues that might be still debated in the West, by now the discussion in Central and East Europe has shaped as a set of qualitatively different problems. Some of the questions that loom large, both explicitly and implicitly, are the following: how to accommodate the phenomenon conceptualized in the West within the system of a particular national literature? what is the genesis of the postmodernist phenomenon within the history of this particular literature? in what ways do the main features of this phenomenon differ from the set of features of its Western counterpart? The discussion of these issues ultimately translates into the shaping of a definition (or definitions) of postmodernism in this region.

Conceptualization of the postmodern as a historical versus a typological phenomenon constitutes an interesting aspect of the debate in Central and Eastern Europe. It should be noted that the idea of the historical postmodern is harder to accommodate in the context of the cultures in question and is thus less popular (Kuritsyn, a prominent Russian critic, is inclined to regard it as a modern phenomenon and a qualitatively new stage in the development of Russian culture, but his voice does not express the opinion of many scholars; see 1992, 1993/1994a). Postmodernism as a meta-historical/typological/ cyclical phenomenon (that is a sort of an avant-garde) is, for many scholars and critics, a much more comfortable model that eliminates the pre-condition of the qualitatively different basis. Thus, Lipovetsky (drawing on Umberto Eco) substantiates his belief in postmodernism as a recurrent stage in aesthetic evolution (1993/1994a, 1999). Each era has its own modernism, and consequently, postmodernism, which critically reevaluates the experiences and aesthetics of the past. His position is also shared by Zatonsky, who in one of his articles discusses what is, in fact, the historical typology of the postmodern conventions in world literature, claiming that a "crisis-like world-view is not a unique historical act, but an inevitably repeating itself stage of the circular movement of the human spirit" (191, my translation). The prominent Ukrainian literary scholar Hundorova establishes her conception of postmodernism as an ahistorical phenomenon, as a reaction and logical conclusion of the modernism of each epoch, and as an essentially cyclical category (1995). The idea of rereading the modernist and avant-garde classics in contemporary Ukrainian literature as the source of the postmodernist impetus figures prominently in her discourse. The idea of cyclical development is also popular with those who hope for a change of the paradigm. Thus, Slavetsky, conceptualizing postmodernism as "posthumanism," and reflecting on certain regularities of the development of the literary process, predicts that the present-day "featureless," plotless, "collage" prose will return – "in some renewed form" – to the prose of events, plots, and characters. Already now, he claims, the diversity of the "movement" (postmodern) is clearly visible in its combination of the realistic and phantasmagoric, its more distinctive ideological charge, as well as its nostalgia for well-constructed plot and characters (1993/1994).

Although within existing theoretical discussions of Central and East European postmodernism there is a visible lack of "unifying" theories, the works of Mikhail Epstein (the Russian-born scholar working in the US) stand out as an original attempt at drawing a theory of the "totalitarian post-modernism" (1995a, 1995b; see also Epstein, Genis, and Vladiv-Glover). Taking up Baudrillard's concept of *simulacrum* as a key notion of the postmodernist cultural production, Epstein argues that the historical reality of Russian nation in particular had always been nothing but a historical continuum of *simulacra*, with its apotheosis in the totalitarian Communist regime as an ultimate hyperreality, giving rise to two waves of postmodernism in Russia: 1) socialist realism of the 1930s and later years with its manifestation of essentially postmodernist features (creation of hyperreality, struggle against modernism, erasure of specifically Marxist discourse that was gradually replaced by an eclectic mixture of different philosophies, erasure of the opposition between elitist and mass culture, an attempt to construct a posthistorical space, etc), noting, however, that this "postmodernist" stage lacked "the playful dimension and ironic self-consciousness so typical of mature postmodernism"; 2) conceptualism of the 1970s (1995a, 40-42). Thus, according to Epstein, the postmodern "condition" existed in the Soviet society long before it started to be seriously discussed in the West. If accepted, such an approach could also be easily applied to other national republics of the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser degree, the satellite states. However, Epstein also extends the idea of *simulacrum* well beyond the totalitarian period back to the times of Peter I. Playing with the fact of Russia's notorious inability to achieve any practical results in the area of economic projects, educational reforms etc., which were doomed to remain in the realm of pure ideas, Epstein thus claims that Russia has been inhabiting a certain hyperreal space for centuries. Here he obviously takes the concept of simulacrum to its logical extreme, and fails to differentiate between the element of simulation, inevitably present in the sociocultural space of human civilization with the development of abstract thinking and discursive (in the broadest sense) representation, and the invasion of technological simulacra in the postmodern age. Although Epstein undoubtedly constructs a catchy argument, it can hardly be developed into a working tool.

Kuritsyn's theorizing of (Russian) postmodernism as a "new primitive culture" (1993/1994a), although replaying many common-place maxims on the role of popular culture in the postmodern, is still standing out in the broader context of Russian critical discourse. The very designation of the "new primitive culture" – explicitly or implicitly –

suggests several connotations. Firstly, it is juxtaposed with the "old" primitive culture, which emerged with a appearance of a "form of matter capable of reflecting itself directly – man." In contrast to it, the "new" primitive culture celebrates the moment culture begins to reflect itself – "an ability it naturally possessed immediately but became aware of as a dominant only in the modern era." Postmodernism, as opposed to modernism, is "cycling back on itself," it is a culture within a closed circle. One of the elements that brings the "old" and the "new" together is the subversion (or, according to Barthes, "death") of the category of authorship (54).[35]

Putting aside the opposition of "old" and "new," we can also argue that "primitive" postmodernist culture is primitive mainly in relation to its successor – modernism. Specifically on the Russian ground, however, the non-primitive (high) culture takes on a two-fold manifestation: as a high culture model endorsed by socialist realism; and as a high-style literary paradigm, so essential to Russian spirituality and the institution of culture. Among the features of the "primitive" postmodern culture, singled out by Kuritsyn, his conceptualization of ritualism is particularly interesting. Every culture is essentially ritualistic; the socialist culture, however, is one of ritual *par excellence*. Although the critic does not dwell on this aspect of Russian postmodernism in particular, rather emphasizing universal ritualism as part of any social structure, it should be noted that parodic and ironic rereadings of the Soviet ritual were essential to early postmodernist texts of the Soviet period; they also remained important in the post-totalitarian period, although the parody was paradoxically often complemented by post-totalitarian nostalgia. Kuritsyn returned to this issue later, specifically discussing the particular preoccupation of the post-Soviet postmodernist prose and poetry with Soviet nomenclature (brand names of commercial goods, names of plants and factories, various Soviet realia, etc.) which abounds in some authors (1994b). Enumerations of these items exhaust the external reality as mere listings of irrelevant objects, also acting as a simulacrum for the presence/semblance of structure in the postmodernist text.[36]

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[35] It should be noted that in this version of English translation the adjective "primitive" does not entirely render all the nuances of the original Russian word "pervobytnaia [kul'tura]." The latter can be sooner interpreted as "primordial," which, although including the connotation of primitiveness discussed here, at the same time implies the beginning of a qualitatively new stage, freshness of artistic perception, etc. Thus, Kuritsyn comments on the postmodern: "Ahead lies a new, virtually unmastered reality, the reality of the spirit. Before that reality we are just as much 'novice men of letters' as primitive artists were 'novice' before the bulk of the 'old' reality. We end up feeling like those primitive artists did" (1993/1994a, 54).

The "primitiveness" of postmodernism, however, should not be taken lightly, and Kuritsyn makes particular emphasis on the intellectualism and sophistication of the Russian postmodernist project. Although the mixture of high and low styles is one of the canonized postmodernist conventions, in its best representations (Viktor Erofeev, Andrei Bitov, Dmitry Prigov, among others), Russian postmodernism is nothing but a version of Western popular culture. As Kuritsyn pointedly argues, "the postmodern is an activity of highly educated people, 'casters of pearls,' who can find their way easily around serious issues and are fluent in the languages of various cultures," concluding that Russian postmodernism in its best examples includes "some excellent literature" (1993/94a, 66).

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[36] For a discussion of enumeration as a ritual, see Kuritsyn 1993/1994a, 64-65; Lipovetskii 1993/1994a, 75-76.

Postmodernism is often placed exclusively in the context of popular culture, which manifests a common misconception of Western postmodernism as an all-permissive, shallow culture, dating back to Fuentes' infamous "Nothing matters, anything goes" (which, in fact, refers to the early stage of postmodernism, and is more of a statement of the programmatic radical opposition to the "ivory tower" of high art than a definition). This conception is undoubtedly detrimental to the reception of national postmodernisms. Some scholars try to restore the true sophistication of the postmodernist enterprise, which has always been an endeavour of intellectual circles (cf. Kuritsyn above). Thus, Polish scholar Janaszek-Ivaničková, in her emphasis of the political significance and social involvement of Central and East European postmodernism, condemns the failure of "Polonocentric circles" "to realize that it is not permissiveness, escapism, mannerism, and secondariness that are decisive in postmodern conquests of the world.... What is decisive is anti-fundamentalism and pluralism, the victory of the so-called `weak thought' which is by no means weak but merely conscious of its limitations, ... and a final departure from 'great narratives'" (1995, 810).

The second-wave influx of postmodernism, which developed in the 1990s, impacted both well-known writers and many new literary figures (as well as dilettantes) who were attracted to the "fashionable" trend of the decade. Inevitably, at the other end of the "production line" of postmodernism, there were some works either of overall low quality or ones too engaged in a self-sufficient exploration of the form, which was largely seen as a sort of artistic degradation by many critics. Commenting on the importance of meaning of a literary work in the broader social context and the negative reception of such literature of the pure play of form, Lipovetsky, for example, suggests that "in polishing their prose [technically], none of the 'new wave' authors has been concerned with the *philosophical* justification and provision of their style..." (1994, 79, emphasis in the text). Stepanian, referring to the works of writers such as Levkin, Kabakov, Volodin among others, longingly reflects about the presence of "genuine" reality in the analyzed texts (62-64). Although he emphasizes that a new return to reality in literature will be strongly derivative in its origins (particularly in the immediate aftermath of socialist realism!), he argues that "new realism" with its insistence on "the *real* existence of higher spiritual essences" will establish a viable challenge to the present-day postmodernism (66-67, emphasis in text). A search for disappearing meaning and values appears to constitute an important part of the critical debate; it reflects not only a particular readership, but also a need for a more stable value-system in the face of the radical social changes that the post-totalitarian societies have been undergoing in the past decade.

Based on the above discussion it is possible to articulate several factors that have played and continue to play an important role in the shaping of reception of postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Ideological and Epistemological Void

The final collapse of the totalitarian "isms"created what may be designated as an ideological and epistemological gap that destabilized the world view of several generations. Penetration of the newest "ism" of the postmodern to all levels of cultural critical discourse and media with or without due attention to its actual meaning is highly symptomatic of the need to fill the void created after the disintegration of all well-established and spiritually "comfortable" conceptual models.

Although such a situation is essentially superficial and detrimental to the reception and understanding of more meaningful and complex forms of postmodernist art, it, in fact, reflects the significance and true scale of what is referred to in the critical discourse of Central and Eastern Europe as a spiritual and ideological crisis, and the radical change of epistemology in the post-totalitarian world. Thus, Kara-Murza, Panarin, and Pantin, talking in particular about Russia, link it primarily to the "loss of the previous forms of cultural self-identification," "loss of the feeling of historical perspective and the lowering of the level of the nation's self-evaluation," and "loss of the absolute orientations" among other factors (155, 157).[37] The issue of the cultural self-identification mentioned in the above citation inherently includes the issue of literary space within the framework of the national cultural space and a search for a continuity in the national literary process.

Stepanian attempted to summarize the basic world view postulates that arguably comprise the postmodern condition in post-totalitarian and post-imperial Russia (if the latter descriptor is applicable), implicitly narrowing it down to the condition of human consciousness:

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[37] Also cf. Ageev. Although the same crisis-like condition is applicable to Ukraine, in Poland, where the disintegration of totalitarian structures started much earlier and was more gradual, this factor was less strong. Even so, the epistemological crisis figures prominently in some literary works (cf. my analysis of Tomek Tryzna' novel *Panna Nikt* in Chapter 3).

> First... is the loss of faith in a higher meaning and purpose of human existence beyond the individual... Second, reality is irrational and unknowable.... Finally, not only is there no such thing as absolute truth, there is no hierarchy of truths either; all people exist in their own special world, and the truth of each of these worlds ... is just as true and important – or just as untrue and unimportant – as the truth of anyone else. (62)

The author also comments that although it is not an "apocalyptic" development, it is at the same time a universally pervasive sense of the end for the progressive movement of the human spirit. The spiritual crisis in Russia, according to Stepanian, is largely a response to the prevailing spiritual atmosphere globally (in the West?), which affected the Russian society after the protective shell of "ideological infantilism" was broken in the late 1980s - early 1990s; needless to say, the effect of this influence was significantly "helped" by the radical sociopolitical crisis within the country itself.

Changes in the Literary Institution and the Decline of the Messianic Role of Literature

Contemporary Russian culture has traditionally been "literaturocentric" (Ageev 25) and, as Emerson justly remarked, "[f]or too long ... literature has been the real world" (1992, 367; also cf. Zverev and Stepanian 37). Although Emerson speaks of the Russian context, this observation is also true for other post-totalitarian societies. The collapse of the institution of literature as part of the totalitarian structure occurred on several levels: decentralization of the state-run literary apparatus (as a structure/ institution) and literary production (as a process); legitimization of the marginal; general decline of the messianic role of literature in the society; re-evaluation of the canon and rewriting of the national literary history; emergence of pluralism in the choice of artistic means and modes of expression (welcomed by some and deplored by others); deconstruction of the cherished mythemes of the traditional conception of literature in the societies Central and Eastern Europe (the grand master-authors of the previous literary epochs, literature as *the* reality, social responsibility of literature, etc).

Elsewhere, and a lot later, Emerson revisits the problem of the crisis of the post-totalitarian literary institution. Again, although she talks specifically about Russia, most of the commentary bears a lot broader significance:

> At stake in freshly post-communist Russia was not the legitimacy of the national language itself, or the opportunity to advertise one's own literary history, traditions, and cultural heroes (after all, the whole world knows Dostoevsky and Tolstoy). Russian professionals sought the right to discuss these, and other, phenomena through the formerly taboo lenses of Foucault, Derrida, Blanchot, Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man – in a word, the right to practice in Russian journals what has long been the familiar binding gesture in English and Comparative Literature departments in the Western academy: a juxtaposition (and thereby a comparison) of disparate national works through some "transnational," transcendent theory. Ever since the abolition of state censorship in August 1991, legal rights to do so have been in place; the current debate is more over the appropriateness, and even the decency, of such a reorientation. For now that those

> European philosophers are household words there too, Russian culture risks losing the exceptional status she enjoyed for two hundred years as the creator of "obligation literature," literature that stood up to the state and put poets in the front lines of the struggle for humanity. Traditionally, great Russian literature has been not entertainment but liberation, salvation. The discovery that the free word is neither dangerous, sacred, nor unifying but rather banal and noisy, one more competitor for attention in the marketplace, was a disillusionment to many critics of the older generation. Sensing this loss of status in the literary word, and lamenting the empty, nihilistic relativism of many Western theories threatening to take its place, the Russian backlash has been fierce. This curious battle, between the "normalizers" (those who insist that literature has the right to be ordinary, trivial, pleasurable) and the "exceptionalizers" (all Russian literature worthy of the name demands that its readers change their lives), is worth watching as Russian seeks a post-communist identity. (Emerson 2004, 3)

Although the crisis of literature and literary scholarly thought, generally, did not completely escape the attention of critics, at the same time it never really became a subject of an objective examination. The radical shift in the social status of literature, the decline of literature as a carrier of the spiritual and transcendental truth, the collapse of both pre-Soviet traditional literary structures and Soviet "high-cultural," "literaturocentric"structure revealed a functional vacuum. Also, if literature had been a traditional cultural currency for every well-educated (and less-educated) member of the society, it suddenly gave way to every-day economic concerns, and for once there arose an issue of affordability of the "spiritual" commodities. The problem of the changing social status of the artist (in the broadest sense) is a recurrent theme in many scholars' and writers' works. Thus, Andrukhovych (ironically, one of the more commercially successful postmodernist writers and poets in Ukraine) offers this tongue-in-cheek commentary:

> Poets are not wanted. ... they turn out to be no use. They are too big a luxury for this society. Poets are spitting back at this society. They are paying it back. They are writing, as at all times, for themselves. In a more and more hermetic and closed way. Ukrainian poetry is becoming ever better. Soon it will stop being read at all. (cited in Kharchuk 1994, 120, my translation)

The end of literature as opposition has also impacted the status of writers. What Zabuzhko, a prominent Ukrainian philosopher, critic and writer, defines as the "fall of the 'poetry-as-opposition' tradition" can be easily redefined as the fall of the "literature-as-opposition" tradition. Commenting on the status of writers in the post-totalitarian period, she says:

> The "New Wave," the generation to which I belong, is actually the first one after the last six decades that is freed from the obligation "to save the nation." Thank God the nation does exist, its development is guaranteed by a newly born statehood, so we are not forced any longer to bear the exclusive responsibility for its historical fate, to be national heroes, and redeemers... Of course, under those circumstances, our popularity, compared to that of our predecessors, has tangibly decreased. ... we lost charisma. (1995, 275)

Various aspects of the issue of the status of literature are also prominent in the debate between the proponents and opponents of Polish postmodernism (the degree of its political and national involvement, the issue of subjectivity, the abandonment of meaning or, alternately, the search for it, the degree of assimilation of Western poststructuralist/ postmodernist philosophy and theory in literary practice etc). All such discussions display an implicit clash primarily between the drive towards joining Western cultural paradigm (more experimental writers of, usually, younger generation) and the established tradition of the cultural code (the traditionalists). As Janaszek-Ivaničková remarks, "trudno oczekiwać postmodernizmu w kraju, gdzie nie dopuszcza się myśli o literaturze wolnej od społecznych zobowiązań" (1995b, 81)[38], yet adding that on East European/Polish ground most viable is "paradygmat postmodernizmu zaangażowanego np. w walkę z utopiami totalitarnymi, logosem imperialnym, deformacią prawdy itp. niż ten w którym o nic nie chodzi, w którym wszystko uchodzi" (ibid., 81-82). [39]

The following passage, although lengthy, deserves being quoted in its entirety because it is a wonderful illustration and summary of two things: how postmodenrism is perceived in Central and East European cultures and how the function of national literature is thought of (at least in the more traditional circles):

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[38] "It's hard to expect postmodernism in a country where its is not acceptable to think of a literature free of social obligations" (my translation). From the vantage perspective of the twenty-first century, the author would have to agree that such literature does exist and the traditional way of thinking is changing.

[39] "... a postmodernist paradigm engaged in a fight, for example, with totalitarian utopias, imperial logos, and deformation of truth rather than the postmodernism of 'nothing matters, anything goes'" (my translation).

... "postmodernizmem" rządzi kult sztuczności, literaturą polską rządzi kult autentyczności. Cechą i wartością "postmodernizmu" jest dekonstrukcja rozumiana jako fragmentaryzacja, w Polsce koniecznością i powinnością jawi się rekonstrukcja (czyli odbudowywanie, a nie niszczenie). "Postmodernizm" gloryfikuje hedonistyczne przeżywanie czasu teraźniejszego, a przeszłość i przyszłość nie są dla niego wartościami, natomiast w Polsce każda przeszłość jest przedmiotem kultu, a przyszłość – stanem pożądania. "Postmodernizm," fragmentaryzując przeszłość, likwiduje ciągłość, tymczasem literatura polska ciągłość (i jej zagubione czy zniszczone ogniwa) programowo pielęgnuje. Literatura polska kultywuje też historyczność i tragizm, podczas gdy "postmodernizm" całkowicie unieważnia i unicestwia te kategorie. W estetyce "postmodernizmu" nie ma wartości, a istnieją tylko stereotypy, natomiast w literaturze polskiej nawet stereotypy są lub chcą być wartościami. ... W "postmodernizmie" rzeczywistość jest jedynie obracaniem konwencjami, w literaturze polskiej konwencje są obnażane, po to, by wykazać istnienie niezależnych od nich wartości, np. rzeczywistości (bytu), prawdy, sensu, etc. "Postmodernizm" wyrzeka się wiary w budowanie czegokolwiek od początku, natomiast w Polsce ta wiara jest od pokoleń stałym składnikiem społecznej świadomości. "Postmodernizm" nobilituje kulturę popularną, w Polsce kultura rozumiana jest elitarnie. W "postmodernizmie" nie ma granicy między *high* i

> *mass culture*, w Polsce granica między kulturą wysoką a niską jest różnicą we wszystkim podstawową.... (Bolecki 1999, 22-23, emphasis in the original)[40]

All of the comments in this statement are applicable directly to other literatures of the post-totalitarian region and show the degree of resistance and degree of "incompatibility" of the postmodernist paradigm with the prevalent (or, at least, older) models of literary production. This quotation, however, also betrays some deeper concerns about two distinctly opposite thrusts in the national literatures in question: one of them represents a distinct impetus towards decentering the structure, the other, towards articulation and re-affirmation of the centre; one represents the aesthetic of societies/literatures informed by the world view of postmodernity, the other — by the concerns and anxieties of postcolonial, or, in a broader sense, peripheral states.

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[40] "... in 'postmodernism' there is a cult of artificiality, and in Polish literature, a cult of authenticity. One of the characteristics and inherent values of 'postmodernism' is deconstruction in the sense of defragmentation; in Poland, a matter of both necessity and obligation is reconstruction (i.e. rebuilding, not destruction). 'Postmodernism' glorifies hedonistic experiencing of the present while the past and the future do not matter; in Poland the past has always been the matter of a cult, and the future – an inspiration. 'Postmodernism,' by fragmenting the past, destroys continuity; Polish literature cherishes continuity (and its lost or destroyed links). Polish literature also cultivates the historic and the tragic, while 'postmodernism' disdains and destroys these categories. There are no values, only stereotypes in the postmodern aesthetic; in Polish literature even stereotypes are or trying to become values.... In 'postmodernism' reality is a mere juggling of conventions; in Polish literature conventions are bared to show the existence of independent of them values, such as reality, truth, reason etc. 'Postmodernism' denounces the belief that one can build from scratch; in Poland this belief is passed on from generation to generation and is an inherent part of social consciousness. 'Postmodernism' elevates popular culture, while in Poland culture is elite. 'Postmodernism' does not differentiate between high and mass culture, while in Poland this demarcation line constitutes the foundational difference..." (my translation).

Postmodernism vs. Postcolonialism

The debate on postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe (as represented by the quotation above) undoubtedly displays some tensions: between postmodernist cosmopolitanism and the post-totalitarian search for national self-identity; postmodernist ahistoricism[41] and the post-totalitarian rediscovery of history; a search for a new epistemology and the sense of an abrupt break of the historical continuum. Certain resistance towards conceptualization of national models of postmodernism can be explained in part by the fear of sacrificing the national traditions in favour of seemingly alien and foreign concepts. Although postmodernist literature existed in the totalitarian period, it did so quietly and unobtrusively, without due recognition in the critical discourse and without being designated specifically as postmodernist; it certainly became a more "loud," invasive form in the 1990s, and the debate suddenly encompassed not only the narrower aspects of the literary form, but also broader aspects of literary production and, more generally, culture, as well as the philosophical issues of the changing epistemology.

Today, the global community's processes of self-definition and self-articulation engage with two main conceptual, ideological loci, which are postcolonialsm (together with the satellite notion of peripherality) and postmodernism: "They [concepts of postcolonialism and postmodernism] push their way forward ... because they are large categories: they make claims to fix the present moment in the most general, historising terms possible" (During 366). Some scholars agree that "[t]he politics of postmodernism and postcolonialism have uncertain and multiple valences. Similar techniques and forms in theory and practice can be used for opposite political ends" (Hart 2003a, 153). It is often argued that the postmodern is just one aspect of a complex discursive/cultural system that is an inherent part of the hegemonizing impulse of Western discourses: thus, even though the postmodern professes pluralism and denounces hegemonic practices, it is ultimately apolitical and betrays any larger projects of emancipation that define the societies situated outside the immediate geopolitical context of North America and Western Europe.

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[41] Ahistoricism (the way it is often referred to by Central and East European scholars and critics) means primarily the erasure of the metanarrative of history and play with history as a discursive ontology, and not the abandonment of the historical focus in postmodernism. In a society where the national history is going through the process of rebirth and rediscovery and is part of the process of the construction of national self-identity, such an approach is not always appreciated.

Arguments over the rapport between postmodernism and postcolonialism have become an important aspect of critical discourse since the 1990s, possibly extending back to the beginning of the 1980s. Thus, for example, Kröller claims that "[in francophone postcolonial countries] postmodernism becomes intimately linked with postcolonialism; its assaults on the concepts of progressive history and geometrically ordered space are attacks on the perceptual patterns of the European conqueror" (120). Tiffin, on the other hand, argues against the cultural imperialism of postmodernism: "the label of 'post-modern' is increasingly being applied hegemonically, to cultures and texts outside Europe, assimilating post-colonial works whose political orientations and experimental formations have been deliberately designed to counteract such European appropriation" (170). She further argues that "[i]t is ... important to refuse contemporary critical enclosure by the neo-hegemonic thrusts of post-modernism and post-structuralism whose very nomenclatures, capturing world space for the accidentals of European cultural time, invoke a neo-universalism from which all post-colonial literatures have been deliberately detaching themselves" (ibid., 179). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin devote an entire section of their *Post-colonial Studies Reader* to the frequently occurring conflation of these two discourses, noting that "the intensification of theoretical interest in the post-colonial has coincided with the rise of postmodernism in Western society and this had led to both confusion and overlap between the two" (1995, 117). Thus, while it is impossible to disengage the conflating discourses of postmodernism and postcolonialism, the ideology and politics of this dynamic dialogue are becoming increasingly more of concern.

In the context of the theory of global postmodernism, if it is conceptualized as a neo-imperial impetus of a discourse that quickly became a new metanarrative,

> "international" postmodernism risks coming off rather as the *internationalizing* of a cultural trend that heals and hurts local cultures simultaneously: on the one hand, its fundamental revisionism feeds into regional emancipation movements; on the other it jams their discursive mechanisms as it tends to unify distinct modes of resistance, flattening out "cultural differences" in the very process of celebrating the "difference." Along these lines, the internationalization of the postmodern may yield homogenizing, indeed imperial(istic), effects, once again justifying some critics' refusal to accept postmodernism as a postcolonial phenomenon (or vice versa). (Moraru 1997, 238)

At the same time, Tiffin concedes that both discourses (Western postmodernism and the oppositional narratives of the multiple and diverse "other") are using essentially the same strategies, such as " the exposure of the politics of metaphor, the interrogation of forms, the rehabilitation of allegory and the attack on binary structuralism of concept and language"; however, they are "energised by different theoretical assumptions and by vastly different political motivations" (172). The main discursive strategy of both post-modernism and post-colonialism undoubtedly is irony and its critical distance of "doubleness." It is this doubleness that "characterizes not just the complicitous critique of the post-modern, but, by definition, the twofold vision of the post-colonial. ... Doubleness and difference are established by colonialism by its paradoxical move to enforce cultural sameness while, at the same time, producing differentiations and discriminations" (ibid., 176).[42]

The complex dynamic of the postcolonial (or, alternately, post-imperial) and postmodern is replayed in many diverse contexts within the space of Central and Eastern Europe. When responding to the debate on international postmodernism as a hegemonizing force, one has to remember, however, the qualitative differences between early and late literary postmodernisms. Early national manifestations can hardly be theorized as a result of Western hegemony, since Western postmodernism itself (both literary practice and theory) had not been fully codified and institutionalized until late

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[42] For more on the debate about the relation between postmodernism and postcolonialism, see Adam and Tiffin; D'haen 1999; Mukherjee; Appiah; During; Slemon; Berry; Quayson 132-55; Hutcheon 1990, 1994a; the 1989 special issue of *Ariel* under the title of *Post-colonialism and Post-modernism.*

1970s - early 1980s. The issue of Western influence becomes more prominent in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, but it is vital to reiterate that, although remaining the excluded "other," the cultures of Central and Eastern Europe have always been part of the broader European paradigm, and the desire to bridge the gap and to articulate their "Westerness" became, if not a universal, a very significant part of the cultural discourse of these societies. In the process of balancing out the argument on postmodernism as a neo-imperialist thrust, it is important to emphasize that not only these two discourses – postmodernism and postcolonialism – manifest some obvious overlap of political interests, as pointed out by Tiffin above, but the particular discursive strategies and devices (arguably borrowed from postmodernism) can be appropriated for local/specific ideological and political goals.

Thus, at the other end of the range of this debate, some scholars see the situation as largely beneficial, emphasizing its pluralizing, democratizing impetus. For example, Janaszek-Ivaničková, in one of the rare attempts to conceptualize the "postmodernist breakthrough" in the more general context "from the point of view of Central and Eastern Europe," summarizes its main points: 1) the victory of marginal thought; 2) a new understanding of the ontological order of the world; 3) the rejection of determinism; 4) a new comprehension of truth; 5) pluralism (Janaszek-Ivaničková and Fokkema 1996, 10-11). Although it is obvious that these features are in fact hardly different from their Western counterparts, their contextualization on the post-totalitarian ground acquires a distinct political colouring. The significance of this breakthrough lies primarily in "changing the social and philosophical consciousness of these countries" (ibid., 10).

As all of the above shows, the debate on literary and, generally, cultural postmodernism in the post-totalitarian states under discussion goes beyond a simple definitional and "pro-and-con" struggle, which would make it just a belated extension of the important part of the still on-going Western debate. Although it embraces certain points of convergence with Western theories (such as an epistemological break and aspects of sociopolitical engagement), there are also issues of more specific relevance for the literary communities in question. Discussions of Central and Eastern European postmodernism, which coincided with the collapse of the old cultural models, involve the problem of the present status and the future of the national literatures in question, of situating them in the framework of the world literary process, and reevaluating such key concepts of the literary institution as "tradition" and "value" which inevitably bear on the issues of particularly national identity and cultural idiosyncrasy.

In reviewing this literary situation, particularly in light of the contributions of the most pertinent scholars, a few points appear relevant: engaging in the broader context of the postmodern provided the literary communities of Central and Eastern Europe with a new perspective of the national literary process and literary history; it marked a qualitatively new stage in reexamination of tradition and cultural values; it made the literary process more lively and diverse; and it enriched both literary practice and critical discourse with the alternative aesthetic choices and theoretical models, opening new vistas towards a truly democratic language.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I will analyze particular examples of Central and Eastern European fiction of the totalitarian and post-totalitarian periods, and will further examine the theoretical and conceptual models and approaches discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER II

Central and East European Postmodernism of the Totalitarian Period

(1960s-1980s)

II.1 Polish Postmodernism of the 1960s-1980s

General Overview

The term "postmodernism" had already appeared in Polish criticism towards the end of the 1970s, although it was confined to the context of art to describe its self-awareness and self-reflexivity. References to literary postmodernism and generally postmodernity did not enter Polish critical discourse until the mid-1980s (Janaszek-Ivaničková 1997, 423, 424). One of the main reasons the term (and the related literary practice itself) encountered significant resistance was that literature was viewed predominantly as a vehicle of social and political concerns – both traditionally (i.e. historically) and in the context of the totalitarian society (see Chapter 1). Even though engagement with the issues of socio-political reality was an important part of the postmodernist discourse – both in the West and in Central and Eastern Europe, this aspect of the postmodernist paradigm was commonly overlooked because of a more sophisticated encoding and the lack of explicit (thematic) connections.

Some of the earlier examples of the postmodernist practice in Poland can be found in the drama of the absurd and the grotesque that emerged as early as the late 1950s and continued into the 1970s.[43] It was represented by the playwrights Sławomir Mrożek

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[43] Proliferation of the drama of the absurd was common for most Central and East European countries of this period.

(*Męczeństwo Piotra Oheya* [*The Martyrdom of Peter Ohey*], 1959; *Zabawa* [*Fun*], 1962) and Tadeusz Różewicz (*Kartoteka* [*The Card Index*], 1960; *Świadkowie albo nasza mała stabilizacja* [*The Witnesses, or Our Little Stabilization*], 1964; *Akt przerywany* [*The Interrupted Act*], 1970). Almost forty years later, Mrożek tried to look back at the experience of the theatre of the absurd in Poland and re-evaluate it retrospectively. Acknowledging its affinities with the similar phenomenon in the West, he stressed that

> [n]onetheless, there was a difference between their [Western] and our "theatre of the absurd." They were of the opinion that life and existence themselves are absurd ..., while we believed that it is the governing system which is absurd, and that without it our life would be meaningful. We were not interested in existentialist profundities and remained concerned with something much more urgent, namely the pressure of the totalitarian system. (1997, 15, cited in Janaszek-Ivaničková 1999, n.p.)

In the novelistic genre the name that is singled out by both Polish and Western critics (cf. Janaszek-Ivaničková 1999, 2002; Możejko 1995a) is that of Jerzy Andrzejewski and in particular his novel *Miazga* ([*The Pulp*] 1963-1970). Andrzejewski's prose displays a complex play of postmodernist metatextuality and irony, crossover between various genres and discourses and intertextuality. The abstract concept of the amorphous becomes meaningful not only in relation to the novel itself with its disjointed, fragmented narrative, but also in connection with the characters' and author's reality – ambiguous, undetermined, and meaningless. Teodor Parnicki's experimentation with the genre of historical novel (e.g., *"Koniec Zgody narodów." Powieść z roku 179* *przed narodzeniem Chrystusa* [*The End of the "Pact of Peoples"; A Story from the Year of 179 before the Birth of Christ*], 1957; *Ząbij Kleopatrę* ([*Kill Cleopatra*], 1968; *Inne życie Kleopatry* [*The Other Life of Cleopatra*], 1969) draws on the Borgesian concepts of "forking paths" of the past/future and possible worlds. In his deconstruction of history Parnicki not only engages the reader's imagination, but also subverts the metanarrative of the fixed, unitary construct of the "objective" reality and implicitly questions the validity of the twentieth-century socio-political developments as the only historical option available to the societies of the totalitarian Central Europe. Another important literary figure is Tadeusz Konwicki, whose novels *Mała apokalipsa* ([*Little Apocalypse*] 1979) and *Wschody i zachody księżyca* ([*Moonrise, Moonset*], 1982), among other works, seem to define Polish pre-1989 political postmodernist discourse. Konwicki's world represents a reality that is inherently and intricately full of indeterminacies and ambiguities and in which the narrator tries to make sense of both the textual/narrative complexities and the world outside the textual continuum.[44]

Below I will examine in more detail two authors who received less academic acknowledgement for their contribution to the development of postmodernist tradition in Poland; at the same time – from the chronological perspective alone – they can be conceptualized as two of the more important influences within the earlier stage. While both maintained a significant degree of detachment from the immediate socio-political reality, they became engaged in the articulation of problems of discursivity and broader philosophical issues that made their work an inherent part of the aesthetic and epistemological shift defining the body of international postmodernist discourse.

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[44] For a more detailed discussion of the representation of reality in Konwicki, see Mozejko 1994 and 1997, where the author analyzes Konwicki's works from the postmodernist perspective (esp. 1994, 148-52).

Wilhelm Mach

Mach belongs to the group of lesser known Polish writers in the West (none of his works has been translated into English). His creative work had not received any significant attention in the scholarship on postmodernism until the recent years, when he was acknowledged as one of the more important authors of Polish metafiction. Thus, Możejko places Mach's novel *Góry nad czarnym morzem* ([*Mountains over the Black Sea*], 1961) at the very roots of Polish literary postmodernism (1995a, 93); Janaszek-Ivaničková, while outlining the main strands within this phenomenon, names Mach as one of the major influences (1997, 426). *Góry nad czarnym morzem* defines an important transitional moment if not toward the anti-mimetic novel, then toward a narrative that questions the very possibility of representation and hence its own endeavour and status.

The French *Nouveau roman* Connection

Mach's novel was written in the context of the growing awareness of both academic circles and broader readership of the radical experimentations of French *nouveau roman* that at the time became popularized among the Polish audience. Because Mach's narrative strategy was so clearly innovative and experimental, it was only expected for this work to be received within the larger framework of European developments.

Although metafictional and self-reflexive in the extreme, Mach's novel at the same time does not fit the model of the French novel. With all the sombre and indeterminate "black sea" of reality and the narrator's personal quest through the labyrinths of fiction, it was not the author's intention, as Janaszek-Ivaničková argues, to proclaim the death of the novel, the death of the author, or zero degree writing – the processes that were already conceptualized by the theoreticians of the nouveau roman – "but to oppose existing conventions of the novel and linguistic cliches, in order to be able to better grasp the shape of reality in the transformations of time" (Mach, "Współczesnosc" 1962, 1, cited in Janaszek-Ivaničková 1999 n.p.). It is worth noting that critics participating in the debate that was sparked in Poland by the *nouveau roman* designated *Góry nad czarnym morzem* to be "a supra-novel" rather than an "anti-novel"; Mach's novel was generally ascribed more value than "the mass-scale and already commercialised ... production of the nouveau roman, engaged in minute descriptions of a daily life, reified, cold, and alien towards man" (ibid.), such as in the works of Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor or Nathalie Sarraute. Mach's work rejected the French new novelists' mechanistic treatment of reality; the Polish author's protagonist is intimately connected to the events of the "real" world, although his reality becomes ever more elusive in his attempts to confine and define it within discursive structures.

Identity and Subjectivity

The structure of the novel is multilayered on several levels: firstly, it is organized thematically as a juxtaposition and interweaving of a traditional storyline (although in itself it is far from being unitary and cohesive) and lengthy self-reflexive digressions where the narrator ponders the process of writing, the conventions of narrative fiction, his own role as a creator of a narrative world, etc. Neither of these levels can be designated as primary or secondary; rather, they complement each other and necessitate each other's existence in a complex interposition of the real and discursive worlds. Secondly, the formal structure of the novel is comprised of chapters that further subdivide into first- and second-level diary narratives. There is no clear correspondence between the division of the novel into chapters and the formal structure of the diaries. Chronologically, the excerpts from the second-level or embedded diary slightly precede the first-level diary narrative. Throughout, the linearity of the narrative is often disrupted by entries starting in the middle of a sentence and ending with unfinished, trailing off thoughts, by ambiguous paragraph division and elliptical omissions of unspecified length. Thirdly, the narrative structure oscillates between two distinctly different narrative perspectives, those of Aleksander and Xander, the latter being the "real" narrator's double. The introduction of Xander has a twofold implication for the issue of subjectivity: it tests the narrator's idea of the unlimited manipulation of a constructed, literary world, but also eventually proves the subject to be struggling to contain the discourse he creates, and to be losing control of it. The complex narrative structure itself has an important bearing on the issue of the subject's positioning in relation to and within the world of the novel: it reflects his desire to "contain" reality discursively, to "know" it through structuring it, to capture the truth by articulating it; at the same time, however, the narrator(s)'meanders through the discursive labyrinth as well as his various – conscious or subconscious – slips, subverting, disrupting the very structurality of his thoughts, process and the world he constructs, negate the possibility of such a containment. Although in the beginning it is still possible to identify Aleksander as the primary narrator – or the one that is both the participant of the "real-life" events and the constructed world of the diary/novel, the role of Xander becomes increasingly more ambivalent.

> Xander jest czymś więcej niż tylko mężem Nel – jest także współtwórcą jej egzystencji, jako postać nadrzędna, o osobowości pojemnej i niestabilnej, a skupiającej ... uprawnienia wszystkich możliwych podmiotów opowieści. Jest mieszkańcem fikcji literackiej, ale jest również syntetycznym tworem elementów rzeczywistych. Jest po części tym ja, który te słowa pisze, ale jest również ... tym drugim Ja – umownym, quasi-autentycznym osobnikiem, wpisanym w powieść, w tekst i nie tylko w tekst bohatera centralnego, lecz i innych postaci, jest także sobą samym, Xandrem, kimś, kto bądź się ukrywa pomiędzy wierszami i wyrazami ..., bądź pozwala się oglądać z dystansu jako On (bezczelny mistyfikator!) (54-55)[45]

Although Janaszek-Ivaničková (1999) suggests that Aleksander plays the role of a mediator between various levels of reality and discourse, it is in fact more productive to argue that the figure of Xander acts as a mediating construct, which is supported by the "main" narrator's comments on the function of his double:

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[45] "Xander is more than just Nel's husband; he is also a co-creator of her existence, a supreme being, open and fluid, buying ... the rights to all possible themes of the novel. He is a resident of fiction, but also a synthetic creation of the elements of reality. He is in part the "I" who is writing these words, and also ... that other "I," a conditional; quasi-authentic persona written into the novel, into the text, and not only the text of the protagonist, but that of the other characters; he is also himself, Xander, somebody who will be lurking between poetic lines and phrases..., will allow himself to look back from distance as He (shameless deceiver!)" (here and later all translation of Mach is mine).

> postać mediatywna, pośrednicząca, zmienna, sugerująca podobieństwo a nawet tożsamość ja autorskiego i Ja (lub On) zmyślonego .... Xander niszczy rzeczywistość i odtwarza ją w nowym wymiarze. Ale też żałuje zniweczonego i wzdraga się przed kłamstwem fikcji. (55)[46]

The process of defragmentation of the writing subject into a fluid, liminal body also bears on the issue of identity. In the very beginning of the novel, the narrator constructs his own "objectivity" and reliability – which is done primarily through his resort to the genre of the journal/diary, a classical means of authentication and legitimation of a literary narrative – and claims that his name will remain real ("Nie obejdę się bez imion, zmienię je wszystkie z wyjątkiem własnego, Aleksander – nie czułbym się dość pewnie pod przybranym,"[47] 8). At the same time the stability of his self-identification proves rather fragile as his persona collapses not only into Alexander versus Xander, but also various other versions of his self such as Alec, Ksander, Takale-Ksander, etc. The same concerns the identity of the central female character (a muse-like figure), who assumes (is given?) a number of names: Michalina, Halina, Nel (also cf. other characters: Basyl/Wasyl etc.). In addressing his last entry (written in the form of a letter) to Michasia/Michalina, the narrator emphasizes the significance of his return to the woman's first/original (?) name, although the reader knows from the very beginning that presumably all the names were fictional except the narrator's own. Whether the narrator talks about real people and real events (i.e. "real" in the narrator's world) or whether they are a product of his imagination in the context of the novel he is writing, remains fundamentally unclear.

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[46] "a mediating, flexible figure, suggesting the similarity and even identity of the author's 'I' and the devised 'I' (or He) ... Xander destroys reality and opens it in a new dimension. But he also pities the destroyed world and shudders at the deception of fiction."

[47] "I won't do without [fictional] names, I will change them all with the exception of my own, Alexander – I wouldn't feel comfortable under an assumed name."

Discourse – or in particular, the act of writing – becomes the only mode of existence for Xander, and by extension for Aleksander. Words and the very process of writing are associated with movement, progression, becoming, and life itself; respectively, silence is equated with finality and death:

> i nigdy nie wiadomo, jakie słowo pomyślane, wymówione, napisane będzie ostatnim słowem twoiego życia... ucz się spokojnej i odważnej wyobraźni na konieczność milczenia, która w jakiejś sekundzie okryje cię jak noc i znieczuli nagle a na zawsze, ta konieczność jest niegramatyczna, lekceważy twoją ortografię i interpunkcję.... Tak by właśnie mogło się stać, lecz się jeszcze nie stało, myślisz znowu i mówisz szeptem i zapisujesz... (80-81)[48]

Another important aspect of Mach's narrative that becomes an inherent part of the conception of subject and identity is his foregrounding of the problem of temporality. The writing subject is very conscious of the retrospective remove that separates him from the immediacy and "realness" of the events (he goes back in his memory to recall certain episodes and relationships with certain people; some of his memories are more distant than others). When Xander takes over the act of narration, he starts "reading" Aleksander's memory, which is both a textual/interpretational process and a visual/cinematic one where some pages/scenes are inevitably missing. Memory itself appears to be an "unreliable" text, which in itself becomes a comment on the fundamental quality of any text. This layering of memories not only creates a complex chrono-landscape in the novel but also contributes to further "layering" of the main narrator into different subjects and identities. Through the use of different font types (e.g., caps: "now," which is "then," i.e. in the diary/the narrator's memory, versus "NOW," which refers to the immediate "present" of the act of writing, 35, 67, 74), the narrator externalizes this chrono-landscape and the hierarchy of temporal relations. The fragile unitariness of the subject is thus also deconstructed (or, rather, its inherent fragmentariness is foregrounded) through a temporal perspective; the immediate moment of writing, however, which brings together the plurality of temporal layers and the multiplicity of selves is the only moment that gives an illusion of coherence and meaning. It is the very moment of enunciation, the act of writing that epitomizes the ultimate becoming of the subject in the locus of the present: "... by w nieruchomość tej sekundy, tej kreski na papierze zamknąc ruch czasu w tobie ..." (83).[49] In all its artistic self-sufficiency and self-enclosure, the extreme, thematized self-reflexivity of the novel serves as an important vehicle for discussion of some broader issues of literary production and literary representation.

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[48] "and you never know which meditated, uttered, or written word will be the last word of your life... learn to imagine the inevitability of silence quietly and courageously, the silence, which in a second will cover you with darkness and render you insensible suddenly and for ever; that inevitability is non-grammatical, it disregards orthography and punctuation.... This could happen, but hasn't happened yet; you are thinking again, talking in whisper, and writing..."

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[49] "... to close the movement of time on you in the immobility of that second, that line on a piece of paper ..."

Dialogue With the Tradition

One of the early chapters of the novel (Chapter 9) is dedicated to two prominent contemporaries of Mach: J. Iwaszkiewicz and J. Andrzejewski. The chapter is also structured as an address to the two writers (it opens as an informal and familiar letter) and evolves into an implicit dialogue on the issues of the creative literary process.

Both writers belonged to the realist tradition or the tradition of "objective fiction," as Mach himself observed (53); Andrzejewski, however, later changed his aesthetic orientation and become one of the better known representatives of postmodernist tradition in Poland. Although Mach chooses to bring the discussion into the context of the above two writers, he in fact speaks about Polish literary tradition in general, as well as about the millennia-long preoccupation of literature with social reality. One of the primary functions of art had always been catharsis; as literature reflected life and pondered its meaning, it also cleansed and healed. The phenomenon of catharsis betrays the fundamental ambivalence of our relationship with art (and with reality via art): this relationship is twofold in the sense that art offers us an escape, i.e., helps us to run away from ourselves, yet returns us back to our selfhood (52-53). Mach goes through a long list of authors and characters from the "grand" canon – Faubert and Emma Bovary, Shakespeare, Moliere and Dostoevsky, Antigone, Orestes, Lady MacBeth, Hamlet, Othello, Tartuffe, Raskolnikov, Mother Courage and Joseph K., *Quo Vadis* – to show the persisting "double existence" of the literary characters through/in us. He attempts to argue that the process of mediation between art and reality had always been a lot more complex than it was traditionally claimed in realist representation and the contemporary literature merely bares the mechanism of tension that had always been an inherent part of this relationship. Towards the end of his "dialogue" with the two Polish colleagues, Mach talks about destruction (read: deconstruction) of art/reality and openly questions the validity of the prevalent perceptions of "objective" reality as well as its processing (as, for instance, in the literary/discursive medium):

> Drodzy J. i J. – obawiam się, czy mnie nie pomówicie ... o intencje burzycielskie, destruktywne. ... Ja nie jestem pewny, czy w dzisiejszej dobie rozbicia materii da się dość prawomocnie orzekać, co jest dezintegracją i niszczycielstwem, a co scalaniem i tworzeniem. Czy literatura ma się wyrzec doświadczeń, jednoczących sprzeczność obu tych procesów, doświadczeń, którym jest poddana rzeczywista, konkretna substancja naszego świata? (74)[50]

Mach structures his novel and construes both his narrator and fictional world in such a manner that by the time he initiates the above discussion and theorizes the introduction of Xander versus Aleksander, his narrative itself illustrates the self-deconstructing/-ive nature of art and reality he is talking about. By posing the rhetorical question "Dlaczego pas graniczny między rzeczywistością autorską i fikcją jego utworu jest pusty, martwy, bezludny?" (53),[51] the author ponders and questions one of the fundamental problems of literature – that of mimesis and representation.

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[50] "Dear J. and J. – I am afraid that you will accuse me of a subversive, destructive intention. ... I am not sure if in today's world of the breaking down of material reality one can say what is disintegration and destruction, and what is restoration and creation. Does literature have to represent experiences that unite the contradictions of both processes, experiences that are part of the real, concrete substance of our world?"

Crisis of Mimesis

Throughout the novel, the narrator's status as an autonomous body and his search for answers about his life and universal truths (very much reminiscent of the "grand quests" of many literary classics) is subverted by the very ambivalence of the relation between fictional discourse and reality. The essential ambiguity concerns primarily Aleksander's reality. Although he is involved in a self-reflexive literary game – which explicitly he acknowledges – neither the reader not possibly Aleksander himself knows to what extent his narrative reflects his "objective" reality and whether it reflects it at all. The many questions arising from Aleksander's – and Xander's – world(s) concern first and foremost the nature of the narrative and its capability to "represent" the truth through the mediation of language, as well as issues dealing with identity and selfhood. The questions remain unresolved as the narrator and his double are caught in the symbolical "black sea" of fundamental uncertainties. Mach's discursive games in this novel are similar to later experimentations of Barth in "Menelaid" (from his *Lost in the Funhouse*). Alexander's writing himself into a fictional text not only fails to answer his questions (through the discursive structuring and systematization of his understanding of the surrounding world), but also forces him to pose new (unanswerable) questions about the writing subject's reality. In much the same way, Barth's Menelaus, who engages in an act of story-telling in search of the truth, gets lost in a discursive labyrinth of his life/lives, becoming an empty shell, an eternal voice repeating itself in a complex hierarchy of narrative layers. Although Janaszek-Ivaničková (1999) is right in emphasizing Mach's concern with the process of writing itself, it can be argued that the novel also – and perhaps more importantly – represents reflections on the crisis of Western mimesis. Aleksander's failure underscores the very impossibility of representation and cognition of reality via the mediation of language.

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[51] "Why is the border zone between the author's reality and the fictional world of his creation empty, dead, deserted?"

Mach's novel had a profound impact on the destabilization of the realist tradition in Polish literature. Radical rejection of the realist platform, however, was not an end in itself; it was part of the larger context of the philosophical shift away from the positivist conception of reality that also constituted the crisis of structuralism and structuralist models of sign and discourse. And although Mrożek claimed that "existentialist profundities" presented no interest to writers in Poland (see above) – primarily because they had more pressing socio-political concerns – Mach's novel manifests some fundamental anxieties of the human being in the face of "the existential problem of how a person/narrator can be actualized and still retain the whole breadth and width of his ... possibilities" (Hoffmann, 1997, 283). The dehumanizing effect of the autonomous, anonymous discourse bears on the reevaluation of such foundational premises as the unity of selfhood and meaning, and the issue of the nature of narrative also become the issue of the nature of being and existence.

Stanisław Lem

Starting a discussion on Lem in the context of this study in itself calls for a justification of the choice. The selectivity of the material included in this study – in view of the fairly broad scope of the literature available to the researcher of the topic (cf. the list of names above) – is obvious, as is obvious certain representativeness of the selected examples. In case of Lem a justification is needed for two main reasons. First, it is still almost an intellectual *faux pas* to mix the issues of a genre such as science fiction with "serious" academic discourse, although the science fiction of the period under discussion not only represents some of the processes that characterize the development of mainstream fiction of the time, but also in many ways anticipates them. The status of science fiction as a low-brow, anti-intellectual, pop-cultural type of literature strongly persists, particularly in North America, where the development of the genre in the first half of the twentieth century took the path of the pulp magazine industry with its stereotypical all-male technological adventure stories (as opposed to the more literary dystopian SF subgenre in the pre-World-War-II Europe). Second, although Lem has a huge international readership among the fans of the genre of science fiction, at the same time in the context of the international mainstream canon he belongs to a marginal fiction – both as a science fiction author and as an East Central European. Notwithstanding the fact that Lem has received significant attention in Anglo-American critical discourse (mostly as a science fiction author), his contribution to the development of discourse of postmodernism both in Poland and internationally has not been acknowledged to the extent this author deserves.[52]

Lem represents a particular shift within Polish fiction, specifically during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, and within the broader framework of the genre of science fiction; in the broader context, however, his vision and literary endeavour stand at the very roots of the first-wave postmodernism.

Mainstream Postmodernist Literature and Science Fiction: The Symbiosis of the 1960s-1970s and Beyond

The role of the narrative of science fiction in the shaping of the postmodernist literary tradition remains largely unacknowledged in academic discourse, which can be explained not only by hierarchical relations within larger canon system where some genres are privileged at the expense of others, but also by the very simple fact of the insufficient knowledge of this genre by the scholars whose work is limited to the postmodern mainstream. Although some publications throughout 1980s and 1990s showed that there is sufficient interest in the problem, most of them represented a perspective from within the area of science fiction studies and appeared in the narrowly specializing journals (cf.

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[52] One of the better known works on Lem in English is Ziegfeld's monograph (1985). Among more recent studies are two contributions by Swirski (1997, 2000) and Freedman's *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000). In the latter, the author argues that science fiction is one of the more theoretically informed literary genres, and includes Lem as one of several writers he analyzes in detail (Philip K. Dick, Ursula Le Guin, Samuel Delany). For a rare acknowledgement of the impact of Lem on the development of Polish postmodernism, see Możejko 1995a. The author emphasizes the role that both Mach and Lem played in the early postmodernist literature in Poland (ibid., 93).

Luckhurst; Mathieson; also, see Science Fiction and Postmodernism, a special issue in *Science Fiction Studies* 1991); only very few appeared in the academic journals of broader relevance (cf. Ebert in *Poetics Today*; *Postmodern Science Fiction*, a special issue in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 1992). Even though genre border crossings and intergeneric experimentations constitute one of the quintessential postmodernist conventions (cf. various permutations of autobiography, historical novel, poetry, comics, the visual arts), this phenomenon acquires particular significance in the case of interaction between science fiction and mainstream literary postmodernism: 1) as opposed to other genres, science fiction did not experience a later influence of institutionalized postmodernism, but rather in itself was a source of many themes and tropes that were assimilated in early postmodernist writing; 2) the post-Enlightenment epistemological rift was manifested in the genre of science fiction a lot earlier than in mainstream postmodern.

Within the genre itself a certain qualitative shift started to become distinct in the 1950s and gradually climaxed toward the middle of the 1960s, when the movement of New Wave science fiction was officially inaugurated by Michael Moorcock, the editor of the British magazine *New Worlds.* Moorcock's taking over the editorship of *New Worlds* in 1964 marked the beginning of the programmatic implementation of the vision of the new development of the genre. In the broader context, however, this was a truly international phenomenon that started a good decade earlier, when science fiction began to claim its place within the framework of mainstream fiction through the increased attention to literariness and socio-philosophical issues of the day. Although in North

America it was indeed a qualitatively new development, in Europe (both Western and Eastern) the genre continued in the vein of its earlier tradition, which had always been constituted by such high literary, or "canonically literary" genres as "utopian fiction, satire, and the *conte philosophique*" (McHale 1997, 236).

Among the theorists of postmodernism, McHale appears to be one of the very few scholars who has acknowledged the genre's contribution to the development of the mainstream postmodernist fiction (1987, 1992, 1997). While the discovery of science fiction by academic criticism was delayed by at least a few decades, many mainstream writers had successfully mined this genre's inventory. According to McHale, since at least the 1960s and across the wide variety of postmodernist styles and national traditions, there can be found a substantive corpus of texts that "variously appropriate, adapt, exploit, deconstruct ... the materials, motifs and discourses of SF" (1997, 236). Among those who regularly – or sporadically – "pilfered" from the narrative of science fiction are Christine Brooke-Rose, William S. Burroughs, Angela Carter, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, as well as Kathy Acker, John Barth, Italo Calvino, John Fowles, Carlos Fuentes, Alasdair Gray, and Vladimir Nabokov, to name a few. The spread of this phenomenon is so pervasive that McHale found it possible to devote separate chapters and sections of his two studies on postmodernism (1987, 1992) to the issues of science-fiction, or, in his words, "science-fictionalization" of postmodernist discourse. The conceptual, philosophical, and formal proximity of the two genres allows McHale to designate science fiction as "postmodernisms's noncanonized ... double" (1987, 59). Science fiction's fundamental preoccupation with the issues of epistemology and ontology – issues of cognition, nature and validity of knowledge and reality – is what makes the genre so relevant and places it at the very locus of the intellectual concerns of the 1960s and 1970s, the time of the gradual decline of structuralism and the emergence of the poststructuralist thought. In opposition to the later movement of cyberpunk (primarily in the 1980s and 1990s), a subgenre that exploited the idea of postmodernist play a lot more freely and productively and focused on formal experimentations, science fiction writings of the 1960s and 1970s exemplified the "literature of ideas"; they were concerned with establishing a dialogue within the current developments in philosophy and social sciences, and often resorted to complex narrative structure, sophisticated intertextuality and other high-literature "markers."[53]

Lem belongs at exactly such an intersection of the mainstream postmodern and science fiction. Not only did he work productively in genres other than SF (which will be discussed below), but his contributions to the SF tradition were also invariably informed by the awareness of the developments in the broader context of contemporary literary practice.

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[53] I have taught a university-level science fiction course (that often focused on the second half of the twentieth century) for a few years now and had a chance to observe a certain pattern in the reception of the genre of this period. Students commonly voice their surprise at the intellectual wealth found in the representative texts, at the level of literary complexity that they would not typically associate with the genre, and at the examples of what some of them term as "first-class" literature (e.g., U. Le Guin, Ph. K. Dick, W. Miller Jr., among other writers of the period).

Issues of Epistemology

Throughout most of his creative career, Lem has been fascinated with the fundamental issue of otherness as an inherent aspect of the evolution of our cognitive philosophy and of our conceptualization of selfhood – both in the context of individuality as a human being and collectivity as a species.[54] The pursuit of the "other" that permeated European discourse in a desire of self-definition was the main driving force that informed European discourse of Enlightenment, Romanticism, centuries of colonial expansion and attempts at embracing the "other" through "knowledge," i.e. discursive containment. Although Lem's treatment of the subject can be found in many of his novels (e.g., *Eden*, 1959; *Głos pana* [*His Master's Voice*], 1968; *Fiasco*, 1986), it is most fully elaborated in *Solaris* (1961), where the author extrapolates from the idea of the colonial drive as underlining any scientific process of cognition of otherness; the other side of the process, however, inherently comprises/conceals the necessity of cognition of the other within the human psyche itself.[55] The collective human subjectivity is portrayed in its dormant infancy and is most closely represented by Lacanian *imago,* "the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" or the "Ideal-I" (991). This stage of infancy necessitates the "mirror stage," which is "to establish relation between the organism and its reality" (992) and also entails the process of resolving the "I" 's "discordance with his own reality" (991). The protagonist's – and, by extension, humanity's – journey towards the knowledge of the (non-human) otherness ultimately (and inevitably) fails only to reveal the profound "discordances" with its own other.

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[54] Cf. Freedman's analysis of science fiction and critical theory. He draws on a limited number of contemporary science fiction writers and situates each one of them in the context of a distinctive problematic that forms part of today's intellectual debate in the humanities and social sciences. According to Freedman, Lem is associated primarily with the problems of cognition (96-111).

[55] Because of the inevitable associations of the book with the recently popularized cinematic version, it should be noted that Soderbergh's (2002) screen adaptation does not do a lot of credit to Lem's novel. Lem himself voiced his disagreement with the (mis)interpretation of the novel by Soderbergh, who turned it into a basic Hollywood-style romance (2003, 90-95); although the director tries to construe some deeper subtexts and create the atmosphere of an *auteur* film, his *Solaris* falls desperately short of capturing the spirit of Lem's text. For a filmic adaptation that is much closer to Lem's novel, see the original Tarkovsky film of the same title (1972).

The issue of cognition of otherness, however, is inherently linked to the epistemological limitations of our construction of knowledge. The problem of the nature and validity of knowledge is represented on many levels; in particular, the topos of the library fulfills a multisymbolic function in *Solaris*. The space of the library is given a privileged status both by the designers of the station and – on the subconscious level – by the remaining members of the station's research team: it serves as a refuge and brings solace; it is the "cradle" of truth and knowledge, the ultimate assurance of the foundational solidity of human existence. Its physical structure is significant in itself: "biblioteka nie miała okien i była najlepiej izolowanym miejscem wewnątrz stalowej skorupy" (110), "okrągł[a], wielk[a] sal[a]" (163).[56] The library's isolated layout becomes meaningful in a twofold way: it is a symbolic shelter from the indeterminate and elusive reality that faces the crew outside of the station, from the rapidly defragmenting worlds of their past lives and the disintegrating coherence of their present existence, and from the collapse of science as one of the traditional legitimating and meaning-generating structures; the library (and what it represents/contains) is also fundamentally disconnected from reality and constitutes a self-sufficient system in its own right, a system that supports its own validity but fails to reflect empirical facts through the prism other than that of human (mis)understanding and (mis)cognition.

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[56] "the library had no windows: it was the most isolated area in the great steel shell..." (110), a "great circular hall" (164). Here and further all original quotations from *Solaris* are from Lem 1968; all translated quotations from this novel are from Lem 1987.

The presence of a library – with its shelves and rows of substantive volumes – merely fosters the illusion of human capability to make sense of the surrounding world through ascribing it systematicity and structurality. The researchers on Solaris are painfully aware of the fallacy of the very epistemological premises represented both by their project and the empirical science generally, but, somewhat paradoxically, remain attached to the reassuring materiality of the book collection as the last refuge that harbours a semblance of reason and meaning. The library persists as a metaphysical entity that is the very locus of human knowledge in its totality and all-inclusiveness. Its circular structure is a symbolic commentary on the inherent limitations of human cognition: our knowledge is a closed system that is inevitably brought down to the primary level where there is nothing but assumptions and axioms that cannot be proven without stepping outside the boundaries of the given system[57]; it is also limited by the very deconstructive nature of *logos*, and in this sense Lem's writing pre-empts the premises of the post-structuralist philosophy of language.

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[57] The discussion of the epistemological "closed-system" paradox has much earlier roots in the hard sciences. It had a profound impact on the humanities via subsequent developments in the philosophy and epistemology of the twentieth century. To limit it

In the context of the above discussion of the topos of library it is hard to dismiss the role of the Borgesian intertextual link in Lem's *Solaris*. The most notable connection is the Library of Babel with its "unlimited and cyclical" nature (Borges 58), the library that expands to the limits of the universe and becomes life itself or, alternatively, the universe that becomes the library ("The Library of Babel," 51).[58] The Library of Babel is a discursive replica of the universe (albeit a flawed, imperfect one, as any replica would be); it is enigmatic and undecipherable, hermetic and fundamentally elusive, "a sphere whose exact center is any one of its hexagons and whose circumference is inaccessible" (52). One can possibly speculate on the meaning of its discrete elements and comprehend its isolated aspects, but never see the picture in its entirety. The scholarly pursuit of the knowledge of the Library – and its implied futility, – in which truth can be approximated

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to some of the more conclusive developments, see Kurt Gödel's undecidability and incompleteness theorems (1931) and his proposition that all logical systems are "incomplete" (i.e. certain propositions within a system cannot be proved or disproved because the logical procedure will inevitably involve the axioms of that same system). His ideas were developed further by Alan Turing. These "meta-mathematical" elaborations constituted a radical departure from the formal, structuralist methods in the mechanistic mathematics of the late nineteenth century. Also cf., e.g., Werner Heisenberg's quantum theory and Ilya Prigogine's later contribution to the theory of dissipative structures in chemistry, which had a profound impact on other disciplines, including social sciences (in particular, see his *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*).

[58] Although the design of the Library consists of a complex structure of hexagons, "[t]he mystics claim[ed] that their ecstasy reveal[ed] to them *a circular chamber* containing *a great circular book*, whose spine is continuous and which follows the complete circle of the walls..." (52, my emphasis).

at best but never fully achieved, parallels the quest for knowledge in Western civilization. The library's distinct hexagonal design (the form and its "rational" appearance) masks the absence of the coherent meaning (the content and its irrational essence). At the end, the narrator's only solace is finding a semblance of order through the patterns of inherent chaos: "the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order: the Order" (58). The topos of the library appears significant in a number of other stories by Borges (cf., e.g., "The Garden of Forking Paths" and "The Theologians").[59] Not less important is also his emphasis on the very "physicality" that abstract scholarship acquires in printed, bound volumes, which foregrounds the materiality and substantiality of knowledge and serves as a self-legitimating factor (also cf. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," where the "official," printed status of a published encyclopaedia of a non-existent civilization seems to validate its content). Similarly, the printed word seems to play a significant role in the construction of authenticity of knowledge in *Solaris*, and the protagonist draws psychological comfort from his "interaction" with substantive, thick volumes on the shelves of the library.[60]

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[59] Also cf. an unmistakably Borgesian treatment of the library topos in Eco's *The Name of the Rose*.

[60] Also cf. the treatment of the space of library in Tarkovsky's film. The design of the Solaris library appears to be in stark contrast with the rest of the station, which is futuristic, minimalist, mostly monochromatic and devoid of any distinct presence of the human touch. The library, on the other hand, is deliberately anachronistic. It is a stylized version of the eighteenth/nineteenh-century traditional manor library room with massive furniture and floor-to-ceiling shelving in rich auburn wood, complete with art, antique candle holders etc. The very solidity of leather-bound massive volumes speaks of tradition; it is a zone of comfort and connection not only with Earth generally, but, in more specific terms, with the history of human civilization. It is also the space that reaffirms the continuity of the premises of Enlightenment. At the

The deconstruction of reason and rationality finds its prime manifestation in the discourse of Solaristics. The area of scholarship that emerged around the sentient entity of Solaris – resulting in dozens of theories and schools of thought and hundreds of academic volumes – parallels the labyrinth-like development of our body of knowledge in the broadest sense and reflects on the many pitfalls of the tradition of empirical science. Similar to Borges's notorious encyclopaedic entry on the mysterious region/country of Uqbar, the description of which does not include external points of reference and thus escapes any meaningful definition by means of its "fundamental vagueness" ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," 4), Solaristics grew up from a set of assumptions and hypotheses upon which a whole scholarly discipline was founded. The protagonist, Kris Kelvin, pondering on the futility of the Solaris project, remarks that "nasza wiedza o Solaris, wypełniająca biblioteki, jest bezużytecznym balastem i trzęsawiskiem faktów, i znajdujemy się w takim samym miejscu, w którym poczęto ją gromadzić, przed siedemdziesięciu ośmiu laty" (27),[61] although it was tempting to think that "któraś z hipotez musi po prostu być słuszna, że niemożliwe jest, aby rzeczywistość była całkiem odmienna" (164).[62] The very language as a geocentric construct puts limitations on

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same time, however, the library is about a deep, subconscious nostalgia for the times of Knowledge and Truth and Reason in the age of lost innocence. It is significant that some of the more important scenes in the film take place in the library.

[61] "our scholarship, all the information accumulated in the libraries, amounted to a useless jumble of words, a sludge of statements and suppositions, and that we had not progressed an inch in the 78 years since researches had begun" (22-23).

[62] "surely one of the theories quoted must be correct, and that the thousands of listed hypotheses must each contain a grain of truth [and] could not be totally unrelated to reality" (164).

human cognition and its "szalenie sztucznie [terminy]" (111)[63] cannot reflect and capture the essence of fundamental otherness. Solaricists' and, in particular, Kris's quest for truth is operating as a "wiar[a], przyobleczon[a] w szatę nauki" (171).[64] The self-deconstructive nature of the project, and human knowledge generally, precludes any possibility of knowing the other, and brings into a closer focus the convergence of the epistemological and the moral (existential):

> Wcale nie chcemy zdobywać kosmosu. Chcemy tylko rozszerzyć Ziemię do jego granic. ... Nie szukamy nikogo oprócz ludzi. Nie potrzeba nam innych światów. Potrzeba nam luster. Nie wiemy, co począć z innymi światami. ... Przylecieliśmy tu tacy, jacy jesteśmy naprawdę, a kiedy druga strona ukazuje nam tę prawdę – tę jej część, którą przemilczamy – nie możemy się z tym zgodzić! (75-76)[65]

One of the foundational ideas of Western civilization that is being questioned in *Solaris* is the idea of progress as an unambivalent, linear, forward-oriented progression, a movement that measures the degree of evolution from "lower" to "higher" developmental stages, and as a concept inherently linked to human rationality. Lem's questioning of the fundamental Western frame of reference and value-system participates in the important twentieth-century dialogue of philosophy and other areas of intellectual inquiry.

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[63] "artificial, linguistically awkward terms" (111).

[64] "faith disguised as science" (172).

[65] "We don't want to conquer [the outer space], we simply want to extend the boundaries of Earth to the frontiers of [the outer space] ... We are only seeking Man. We have no need of other worlds. We need mirrors. We don't know what to do with other worlds ... We arrive here as we are in reality, and when the page is turned and that reality is revealed to us – that part of our reality which we would prefer to pass over in silence – then we don't like it any more" (72).

Ontological Games

McHale referred to science fiction as "*the* ontological genre *par excellence*" (1987, 59, emphasis in text). Although the genre has always been concerned, on the thematic level, with "otherworldliness" (to borrow McHale's term, 1987), it is only in the 1960s and 1970s that the realms of the thematic ontological concerns and narrative techniques emphasizing these concerns started to overlap. Such science fiction served as a locus of convergence of the philosophical inquiries into the nature and validity of being and reality(-ies) and the virtually limitless possibilities of the narrative in the foregrounding of and experimenting with discursive "possible" worlds.

Lem's novel *Kongres futurologiczny* ([*Futurological Congress*], 1971) is a quintessential example of such a fiction. Set in a seemingly distant although very recognizable futuristic world – the particular locale is Costa Rica – on the brink of overpopulation, mass destruction through the catalyst of international terrorism, and the government mass-scale use of pharmaceutics to control the unstable society, the novel incorporates several ontological layers of different worlds, taking the reader on a roller-coaster of a mind-boggling pursuit of the "real" reality and never giving him the satisfaction of finding one. With a characteristic black-humour commentary, Lem constructs a virtual labyrinth of "worlds in collision" (McHale 1987, 59) through the numerous flashbacks in the narrating persona's mind (confused because of the earlier accidental consumption of hallucinogens? still hallucinating?); moreover, except for one episode, there are no distinct narrative transitions between different ontological layers. The author throws in strange time-loops and ontological short-circuits where the detail from one reality-world invades another one and disturbs its equilibrium by making the protagonist ponder the possible hierarchy of these realities (or his own mind-worlds?). The only point of reference that the narrator is relatively sure of is the space of the city sewer, where he ends up trying to escape from a terrorist attack. It is ironic that this least appealing and quintessentially marginal and subcultural urban space is the object of the protagonist's hopes and incantations as he is losing his way in the maze of possible worlds ("czyżby i tutaj znajdował się gdzieś kanał, budzik mój i moja kruchta, rękojmia jawy?" 89).[66] Even that space, however, on occasion clearly belongs to the world of hallucinatory dreaming. At no time can the reader be certain about the ontological point of reference, and the open ending of the novel does not prove or disprove any of the described events. The only point that can be argued with a fair degree of certainty is that the protagonist survived the ordeal – whatever the nature of the ordeal was – because the novel is written in a form of a retrospective record of his memories. The author-reader game that is foregrounded in the novel emphasizes frustrating readers' expectations in their search for the external point of reference; just like the narrator in his fictional world, the reader needs a solid framework of reality. The narrative game, however, is far from being a self-sufficient exercise; it plays primarily with our inability to deal with the foundation-less world-model, as reflected through the prism of our reception and processing of a fictional space.

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[66] "could it be that even here somewhere there was a sewer, my guardian sewer, my only talisman and touchstone to reality?" (99). Here and further all original quotes from *Kongres futurologiczny* are from Lem 1983; all translated quotations are from Lem 1974b.

The issue of ontological construction also includes the problem of simulacrum as a social structure, which appears to be one of the dominant motifs in *Kongres futurologiczny.* Across all the ontological levels – from the original narrative framework of Costa Rica to the embedded narrative of the protagonist's stay in the futuristic Manhattan – the problem of the collapsing reality ("rozpuszczanie się ... zanikanie rzeczywistości," 111)[67] figures prominently as one of the organizing (or dis-organizing?) principles of world-building. The structures of simulacra engage in a more complex game than just creating a new level of reality or replacing the reality that is becoming extinct: they manipulate the perception of social environment ("[d]ehalucyniny to nowe specyfiki, po których wydaje się, że się nic nie wydaje," 114).[68] Thus, one of the functions of simulacra is blurring the line between reality and unreality ("można ... naiwnie zakreślić granicę oddzielającą fikcję od rzeczywistości," 106).[69] Lem's commentary on the simulated reality directly echoes Baudrillard's well-known analysis of the third-order simulacrum in the post-industrial society of mass consumption, where he draws, in particular, on the example of Disneyland: "[it] is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real.... It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle" (172). The world of complete simulacrum, although insisting on preserving the "reality principle," at the same time re-evaluates the concept of authenticity. The postmodern death of the myth of originality (or the death of the author) finds multiple manifestations in Lem's novel; among these is a Manhattan art gallery where they "za bezcen sprzedają same autentyczne płótna – z gwarancjami, metrykami – nawet Rembrandty i Matissy!" (65)[70] or the "Self-nominating Nobel Prize Candidate" registration center on Fifth Avenue ("każdy może mieć Nobla, podobnie jak pozawieszać ściany mieszkania najcenniejszymi dziełami sztuki," 106).[71] The phenomenon of simulation, which manifests an oddly liberating potential in the context of the novel, is at the same time distinctly dystopian. The narrator's clear preference for the real-world sewer over the polished world of simulacra is a commentary in itself, even though the issue of "realness" remains hopelessly ambivalent and thus undermines the very possibility of a coherent argument.

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[67] "the breaking down, the eroding of reality" (126).

[68] "The dehallucinides? A new series. They create the illusion that there is no illusion" (130).

[69] "letting people think they can draw the line between fiction and fact" (120).

Parody, Self-Reflexivity and Metafiction

Parody and intertextuality constitute an integral aspect of Lem's work beginning with his early novel *Śledztwo* (*The Investigation*, 1959), a metafictional deconstruction of the detective genre. Parody, intertextuality and a dialogue with the earlier tradition of SF form the basis of his collection of short stories *Cyberiada* (*The Cyberiad*, 1967) and novel *Dzienniki gwiazdowe* (*The Star Diaries*, 1971). Intertextuality figures prominently in *Fiasco*, a novel with an elaborate narrative structure and a dense subtext of biblical and classical mythological allusions, where the stylized intertextual elements and strategically incorporated citations provide an informed reader with a potential clue to the identity of the protagonist (which otherwise remains undisclosed). Parody plays an important role in *Kongres futurologiczny*, which bears distinct resemblance to the postmodernist "academic" novel of the later years. The central event – as indicated by the title – is an international congress of futurologists, the presentation of which is clearly parodic not only through the comic description of the details of academic culture and academic discourse, but also in the context of the clear inability of the academe to offer any practical solutions to the world's problems; Lem's ridiculing of the pseudo-scientific discourse targets the artificial manipulation and construction of a semblance of meaning in scholarship divorced from the pragmatics of reality. Language and linguistics play an important role in projecting the future development of society through "morphological forecasting" and "projective etymology" – an ultimate example of a discourse invading and reshaping the face of social reality.

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[70] "sell only originals – Rembrandts, Matisses – guaranteed, with certificates of authenticity. All dirt-cheap!" (69)

[71] "Anyone can have a Nobel Prize, just as anyone can grace his compartment walls with priceless works of art" (120).

A quintessential example of Lem's metafiction is primarily *Doskonała próżnia* (*A Perfect Vacuum*, 1971), a collection of reviews of non-existent novels and other publications. The book opens with a review of the introduction to Lem's collection (written, in a self-reflexive manner, by Lem himself); the actual introduction is, characteristically, missing, or rather non-existent, and the reader only gets to sample a few supposedly "original" quotes. The author acknowledges his predecessors in the genre, Rabelais and Borges among other key writers, and outlines the premises of his experiment. Absence, or negative presence (i.e. the implied existence of the reviewed books), becomes the locus around which meaning is created. Witty, intertextual, both purposefully shallow and profound, *Doskonała próżnia* is a great parody of the culture of academic book reviewing. Here is a typical example of a commentary on the act of both literary production and reviewing:

> Joachim Fersengeld jest Niemcem, który napisał swą "Perykalipsę" po holendersku (języka tego prawie nie zna, co sam we wstępie przyznaje), a wydał ją we Francji, słynącej z podłych korect. Piszący te słowa też właściwie nie zna holenderskiego, lecz podług tytułu książki, angielskiego wstępu I nielicznych, zrozumiałych w tekście wyrażeń uznał, że się na recenzenta przecież nadaje. (Lem 1974a,71)[72]

Doskonała próżnia was followed by *Wielkość urojona* (*Imaginary Magnitude*, 1973), a collection of introductions to non-existent books. In his tongue-in-cheek rationalization of the pseudo-scholarly innovation of the project the author argues that "[s]ztuka pisania wstępów od dawna domaga się indygenatu" (Lem 1974a, 199)[73] and expresses an urge to reclaim this marginal genre: "oblegała mnie potrzeba zadośćuczynienia temu piśmiennictwu pod zaborem, które milczy o sobie od czterdziestu wieków – w niewoli dzieł, do jakich je przykuto" (ibid.).[74] Ironically, these introductions, unattached to any real works of fiction or non-fiction and presenting "a perfect vacuum" (to borrow the metaphor of the earlier collection), create a coherent and meaningful body of discourse in their own way. Lem's theorizing of "nothingness" as the basis of this work bears on the whole phenomenon of the postmodern:

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[72] "Joachim Fersengeld, a German, wrote his *Pericalypse* in Dutch (he hardly knows the language, which he himself admits in the Introduction) and published it in France, a country notorious for its dreadful proofreading. The writer of these words also does not, strictly speaking, know Dutch, but going by the title of the book, the English Introduction, and a few understandable expressions here and there in the text, he has concluded that he can pass muster as a reviewer after all" (Lem 1979, 80).

> wekslem bez pokrycia (transcendentalnego), zastawem (sfałszowanym), zapowiedzią (niewykonalną) – najwyższą formą alteracji została dziś sztuka. A więc tę właśnie jej pustkę i tę niewykonalność trzeba wziąć za dewizę i opokę; i dlatego właśnie ja, piszący Wstęp do Małej Antologii Wstępów, jestem w dobrym prawie, albowiem proponuję wprowadzenia, wprowadzające donikąd, wstępy nigdzie nie wstępujące, oraz przedmowy, po których żadne mowy się nie rozlegną. ... zabawa ta, najpoważniejsza z możliwych, wprost tragiczna, jest parabolą naszego losu, ponieważ nie ma drugiego wynalazku tak ludzkiego ani takiej własności I ostoi człowieczeństwa jak pełnobrzmiący, wyługowany z

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[73] "[t]he art of writing Introductions has long demanded proper recognition" (Lem 1984, 1).

[74] "I ... have long felt a pressing need to rescue this form of writing from the silence of forty centuries .... from its bondage to the works to which its creations have been chained" (Lem 1984, 1).

> obligów, wchłaniający na amen jestestwa nasze – Wstęp do Nicości. (Lem 1974a, 204-05)[75]

To conclude the brief overview of Lem's work, it should be noted that his postmodernism, both SF and mainstream, was marked if not by a thrust towards "Western-ness" (although very often non-specific, universal Western-ness),[76] then by a characteristic cosmopolitanism that can be found in a good deal of postmodernist literature. At the same time, however, identification along Polish lines was not altogether banished from his oeuvre; if integrated as part of a story, Polish identity was treated without grandiose national sentiments and with a distinct element of self-parody.[77] This utterly un-romantic representation of the national signalled a shift away from the traditional literary models and towards the modern/postmodern questioning of the national myth. On the other hand, the imaginary pursuit of Western culture was possible because of the lax political atmosphere in the country and the fact that socialist realism had declined in Poland by the time Lem started writing seriously at the end of the 1950s; this pursuit emphasized the subconscious drive of Polish culture to embrace the Western paradigm rather than associate with the Eastern political powers, of which Poland was still a part.

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[75] "[t]oday art has become a promissory note without (transcendental) cover, a (counterfeit) pledge, an (unrealistic) forecast – the highest form of alteration. It is precisely this emptiness of art and its unrealizability which should be taken as its motto and bedrock. That is why I am right to present an Introduction to this short Anthology of Introductions, for I am proposing prefaces that lead nowhere, introductions that go nowhere, and forewords followed by no words at all. ... This gravest possible amusement, ... is a parable of our destiny, since there is no device so human, nor such a property and mainstay of humanity, as a full-sounding, responsibility-devoid, utterly soul-absorbing Introduction to Nothingness" (Lem 1984, 8).

[76] This is clear, in particular, from the usual "markers" or realemes that signal to the reader the geocultural specifics of the constructed fictional space; these are primarily personal names and place-names. Even if the action of a novel is not set in a specific, identifiable locale (e.g., as in *Fiasco*, *Solaris*), personal names characteristically tend to associate with Western European languages (not necessarily English) or generally with non-Polishness or "foreign-ness."

[77] A good example of this is the character of Ijon Tichy, the Polish protagonist of Lem's several novels including *The Futurological Congress.* Neither a hero, nor an anti-hero, Tichy is an average man, unremarkable physically and having all the nerdiness of an academic who is prone to getting himself into mishaps and unlikely situations. This character is slightly non-serious and benignly parodic (in opposition, e.g., to Kris Kelvin in *Solaris* or Angus Parvis in *Fiasco*).

II.2 Ukrainian Chimerical Novel of the 1960s-1980s

General Overview

Compared to the situation of the Polish literary scene of the time, the development of Ukrainian literature took a different turn during the period of the 1960s-1980s. In the context of the tri-cultural comparison drawn in the present study, the Ukrainian literary community and creative intelligentsia had the least artistic freedom and were a lot more constricted both in terms of the severity of censorship and the limitations imposed on them by the ideological state apparatus. Generally, within the context of the Soviet totalitarian society, the discourse of postmodernism was oppositional in a twofold way: as an ideologically subversive structure (often in a very explicit way) and as an artistic/ aesthetic alternative. Innovative approaches to the literary medium, experimentation and radical rejection of the platform of realism were generally acceptable in the satellite states (cf., e.g., the 1961 publication of Mach's *Góry nad czarnym morzem* in Poland), although the ideological opposition was still not tolerated, as witnessed through the fate of many works that were not published until the 1980s. In the context of Ukrainian literature, however (as in the case of many other ethnic peripheries within the Soviet Union), the very idea of radical artistic experimentation was deemed a reflection of Western ideology and thus, inherently subversive, condemnable and unacceptable. Nevertheless, the Ukranian "chimerical" novel survived and integrated the official literary system (all the works listed below were printed by state publishing houses) by pursuing "safer" strategies: foregrounding elements of folklore and the fantastic and resorting to a very politically correct topos – the Soviet Ukrainian village – as a setting in many texts of this genre. Another factor that undoubtedly facilitated the emergence of the new aesthetic code was the relatively liberal political and cultural atmosphere of the Khruschovian "thaw" period, the effects of which did not start to be felt in Ukrainian culture until the beginning of the 1960s.

Ukrainian "chimerical" prose belongs to the category of the literary phenomena that have consistently escaped critical consensus; it has defied any precise placement not only within the literary system of the totalitarian period, but also within a broader context of literary systematics. Although its roots go back to the late 1950s, the development of the genre extended further into the 1970s and 1980s, becoming a distinct phenomenon within this national literary tradition. Even though the designation itself was acknowledged and used, very few scholars in Ukraine attempted an in-depth examination of the "chimerical" novel (cf. Pohribny; to a much lesser extent Strelbytsky; Zhulynsky).[78] Outside Ukraine, the Australian slavicist Marko Pavlyshyn contributed to a larger debate on the problem (1988, 1991, 2000), although there has been no significant follow-up. Overall, the relative lack of interest both within Soviet and post-Soviet literary studies and in Western critical literature can be explained in part by the very positioning of the "chimerical" prose within the framework of the mainstream, officially endorsed literature, which in itself devalued the genre, placing it the rather vague, broader category of socialist realism (i.e., by default, everything that was officially produced during the totalitarian period). It is obvious, however, that in the 1970s the "chimerical" prose began to stand out as a distinct literary trend that was difficult to ignore. Thus, Pohribny's 1980 detailed discussion of the subject appeared in one of the leading literary academic journals published in Moscow, *Literaturnoe obozrenie* [Literary Review]. (The title of the contribution is rather telling: "Fashion? Innovation? Logical Development? On the 'Chimerical' Genre in Ukrainian Prose," my translation.) The publication of this article in one of the major Soviet Russian periodicals was of significance in itself. It acknowledged a phenomenon from a literary periphery (everything non-Russian was peripheral) that was hard to discard and that had become a noteworthy development on the scene of Soviet literature. Pohribny's overview of the history of chimerical novel is quite informative in that it outlines the true scope of this development (e.g., he goes beyond the context of Ukrainian literature and refers to a number of writers in other national Soviet literatures that, according to him, worked in this genre, too, 24; he emphasizes, however, that the roots of this tradition are particularly strong in Ukraine, 25). The author places the chimerical novel in the broader context of world literature and argues that it integrates many literary influences, such as the European tradition of Cervantes and Rabelais, Latin American magic realism, the works of Oe Kenzaburo and Doctorow, to name a few.[79] Of particular interest is Pohribny's attempt to conceptualize the main attributes of the chimerical genre: anarchy of style; striving towards anti-composition and anti-style; intentional challenging of literary cliches and dogmas of thought; deliberate distortion of spatio-temporal relations; absence of a conflict; utilization of the grotesque and parody (25-26). Commenting specifically on one of Pavlo Zahrebelny's novels, the critic deems necessary to add that "not to understand this [i.e. the above characteristics and goals of the chimeric novel] means to distort the very essence of this interesting literary work" (26, my translation). The most valuable element of this analysis certainly was Pohribny's acknowledgment of the deconstructive impetus within the genre and its subverison of the official literary code.[80] In his first article devoted to what he designates as "whimsical"[81] literature, Pavlyshyn proposes that the emergence of this literary model was a resolution of the inevitable dilemma between the apologetic and dissident writing (1988, 114), which all of the writers faced at the time. This places the genre in a broader category of literature where the fantastic was used as a means of both escape and resistance, the point to which we will return a little later.

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[78] This is certainly not to say that the authors working in this genre were entirely ignored in the academic and critical circles. Some of them had generated significant critical response, although there was no attempt to see their work as part of a bigger pattern (cf. Kravchenko, Kovalchuk). Within Ukrainian scholarship (particularly in the context of the more conservative 1970s) conceptualization of this body of texts as a distinctly different emerging paradigm would also mean to suggest/endorse an implicit opposition to the existing official discourse.

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[79] For more on the intertextuality of the chimerical novel, see Pavlyshyn 2000. In particular, he argues that the genre has distinct affinities with the Ukrainian Renaissance and Baroque tradition, the Gothic novel, the *Schelmenroman*, the historical novel, as well as Hoffmann and Hesse among other literary figures (104-05).

[80] It should be mentioned, however, that although Pohribny offered a positive reading of the two-decade tradition of the chimerical novel in Ukraine, he still chose to close his discussion in a rather conformist way, that is by criticizing it for being superficial and

Oleksandr Ilchenko's novel that gave the genre its name appeared in 1958 under the title *Kozats'komu rodu nema perevodu, abo zh Mamai i chuzha molodytsia* (*There's No End to the Cossack Clan, or Mamai and the Female Stranger*[82]). The novel carried the subtitle "Khymernyi roman z narodnych ust" ("A Chimerical Novel from the Oral Folk Tradition"). Although this novel was more simplistic and conformist than the later experimentations with the genre, it nevertheless established the main inventory of the chimerical prose: extensive use of the magic and the fantastic, use of the countryside as a setting, extensive use of folklore, proliferation of erotic and sexual subtexts, "whimsicality" of language and style, non-realist construction of space and time, experimentation with narrative, among other things. Ilchenko's successors both utilized

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withdrawing from the conventions of realism (28).

[81] Although issues of translation are always difficult to argue, in this case I strongly prefer to use "chimerical," which is a literal translation of the Ukrainian word "khymernyi" of the same Greek root "chimaira" (she-goat). "Chimerical" implies a higher degree/quality of being "strange," "odd," or "bizarre," along with a hint at the state of "unreality" and "absurdity," while the connotation of "whimsical" is primarily "(wildly) fanciful."

[82] I am following here the translation of Pavlyshyn (2000, 103). Although the English title sounds rather awkward, it is hard to suggest anything better because of the highly idiomatic language of the original.

this model and departed from it. Thus, while the explicitly "carnivalesque" strand continued to develop, a different type of the chimerical novel had also branched out: it was more idea-driven and oriented toward mythology, history and philosophy as well as mysticism (cf. Pavlyshyn's distinction between the "comical"and "mysterious" subgenres of the chimerical, 2000, 104). The first group is represented by the above-mentioned Ilchenko, Vasyl Zemliak (*Lebedyna zhraia* [*Flight of Swans*], 1971; *Zeleni Mlyny* [*Green Mills*], 1976), Ivan Senchenko (*Savka*, 1972), Pavlo Zahrebelny (*Levyne sertse* [*Lion Heart*], 1977) and Ievhen Hutsalo, whose work will be discussed below in more detail. The other strand of the chimerical is best represented by Roman Ivanychuk (*Manuskrypt z vulytsi Rus'koi* [*The Manuscript from Rus'ka Street*], 1979) and many novels of Valerii Shevchuk, whose writing will also be analyzed later in this chapter. In addition to the above, Pavlyshyn (2000) mentions Iurii Shcherbak's *Khronika mista Iaropolia* (*A Chronicle of the City of Iaropil*, 1968) and Volodymyr Iavorivsky's *Avtoportret z uiavy* (*An Imaginary Self-Portrait*, 1981). Although undoubtedly the popularity of the genre had influenced the mainstream to a certain degree and produced other followers of less significance, the above writers constitute the core of the chimerical literary tradition.

Ievhen Hutsalo

Ievhen Hutsalo's best known work associated with the chimerical novel is his trilogy *Pozychenyi cholovik* (*The Borrowed Husband*), *Pryvatne zhyttia fenomena* (*The Private Life of a Phenomenon*) and *Parad planet* (*Parade of Planets*), which was published between 1980 and 1984. The trilogy is rather loosely connected through the unity of setting and the main character; each novel easily stands on its own. Hutsalo deconstructs the "well-made" socialist realist novel along many lines. To begin with, there is no clear linear plot (it would be difficult to summarize what each novel "is about"). Each book is comprised of rather short chapters, "snapshots" in the life of the protagonist. Each chapter's elaborate subtitle serves as its own brief summary; thus, just browsing through the subtitles is sufficient to get an overview of the main events of the book (which, too, are largely disconnected and have no significance on their own). The negation of the importance of a coherent, structured plot is also emphasized through the negation of the well-developed character as an important component of the novelistic genre: although the protagonist Khoma and his wife can certainly be described as "colourful" characters, the author does not attempt an in-depth characterization, thus emphasizing the affinity of his writing with the folk tradition. At the same time, however, each book and the trilogy on the whole are unified by the unique atmosphere of the carnivalesque and phantasmagoric, the mosaic, snapshot-like picture of the world, the proliferation of the multiplicity of discourses and the very experience of the colourful, idiomatic, "whimsical" language, style, and humour that characterize Hutsalo's writing, which in itself is a state of being rather than a fact, a fluid discursive continuum, that shapes the reality of the characters' world.

Construction of Space

The construction of spatial relations constitutes one of the more significant aspects of Hutsalo's trilogy that subverts the conventions of the traditional narrative. The setting is a typical Ukrainian village Iablunivka[83] depicted against the backdrop of the Soviet rural economy with its collective farming and the continuous efforts toward further industrialization of agriculture. In itself, the location is anything but exciting or inviting readers' imagination; through its very lack of appeal, however, the author constructs the setting's function in the context of each novel. The dichotomy in which the topos of the village is engaged is not that of the city versus the village, or the urban versus the rural (cf. the many shifts in the perception of this binary: the romantic worship of the joys and virtues of life in the countryside, the modernist shift toward the urban and urbanization, and the avant-garde poetic treatment of the industrial). Foundational to these world views was the basic, and much earlier, dichotomization of nature versus society. Here, however, we agree with the argument of Pavlyshyn (2000) that it is rather the juxtaposition of the metropolis and the province, centre and periphery, that is foregrounded by the author; the emphasis is, thus, on provincialism as a concept that reflects social and hierarchical relations, with its connotations of stagnation, backwardness, and ignorance.

The protagonist of the trilogy, Khoma, a collective farm worker, has amazing – and equally unpredictable – supernatural abilities that allow him to perform mostly comically trivial and unimportant acts (here I cannot help drawing a parallel with the character of Saleem Sinai in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*). The author often refers to him as a "superman," and the parodic intertextual rereading of the American popcultural icon is quite obvious here – as well as parodying of the Soviet "positive hero," a recognizable cultural cliché that can be traced back to the early Soviet years. Khoma's "phenomenon," which does not yield itself to any rational explanations, transforms Iablunivka. The village becomes a magical space where everything is potentially possible and the ordinary laws of physics do not apply. One important consequence of the protagonist's unique abilities is the inevitable mass media hype (primarily in the West) that places the village in the center of attention of the entire world. Khoma's name makes headlines in London, New York and Tokyo newspapers; his "phenomenon" is discussed on Wall Street and in Dutch "semi-pornographic" magazines; his image is represented in world art and his exploits inspire Hollywood cinematography and Parisian fashion.

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[83] Translated as a "place of apple orchards" or "where apple trees grow," it is a very typical place-name in Ukraine. The very morphology is suggestive of the scale of the place: the suffix "-ivka" in itself indicates that this is a small village, or at least, a small, unimportant, provincial place – a connotation that would be lost on a non-native speaker.

In opposition to the traditional "rural" prose (cf. the nineteenth-century realism or twentieth-century socialist realism), where the construct of village has an inherent self-sufficiency and value and was the prism of which the protagonist's world is viewed, Hutsalo's "global"and cosmopolitan setting inverts the perspective and his village suddenly becomes – in a rather subtle way – an object of a gaze from outside. The metropolis-province dichotomy, thus, extends beyond the backwardness of village versus the civilization of the city, and translates into the provinciality of the entire culture versus the rest of the world. Notwithstanding multiple "violations" of its space ("invasion" of Western media, visits from the representatives of science, etc.) the village remains oddly, almost metaphysically closed up and autonomous; it is an enchanted space – this time not in the sense of Khoma's supernatural abilities but in the sense of its impenetrability to the outside world. By analogy, a similar technique was used by other authors of the chimerical genre; thus, for instance, Vasyl' Zemliak, in his novels *Lebedyna zhraia* and *Zeleni Mlyny* names his village Vavilon (Babylon). Apart from the fact that it is not a name of Slavic origin and, thus, it strikes the reader odd from the very beginning, it is also pretentious to the point of being ridiculous (as well as explicitly anti-realist). This juxtaposition of the world mythology, history, and, generally, global with the local constructs the spacial parameters of the fictional locale as an unclassifiable "zone" that both overlaps with the "real" world (that is, it is recognizable) and, at the same time, differs from it in its functions and its relation to the "outside" world.[84]

Construction of National Identity

The use of folklore and ethnographic detail becomes an important aspect of the chimerical novel and is of interest in the context of the present study to the extent that it contributes to the way fictional space is construed and comments on the issues of national identity, culture and their role in the construction of the historical space.

The discussion of the role of folklore in the discourses of "late" modernity in peripheral cultures emphasizes both the productive utilization of ethnographic topoi for the exploration and reaffirmation of the national difference, and their simultaneous deconstruction in a desire to distance the modernist paradigm from the earlier, romantic models. Ethnography, thus, can be used as an ideological means of manipulating the national space within the historical continuum, or, more particularly, within the modern/post-modern continuum.[85] Because Hutsalo's trilogy mines ethnography for themes, motifs and topoi so explicitly, it is hard to overlook this aspect of his narrative. If the construction of the ethnic space can range from the low-cultural (excessively comical, parodic, with elements of travesty, etc.) to potentially the high-cultural (more conceptual and "reconciled" with or "written" into the code of modernity), Hutsalo's insistence on the decidedly "primitive" presentation of the national space constitutes a commentary in itself. His village stands not just for the rural space but for the cultural space generally, his main characters are typical folk cliches, and his language situates the whole narrative in a very particular context. The author's excessively and pointedly chatty style, extremely colloquial and idiomatic language, and the brevity and disjointedness of most chapters emphasize both the significance of the (oral) story-telling act and the overall unity of each novel as a collection of tales. Thus, his Iablunivka is a doubly fictional space: as an imaginary topos within the novel's structure and as an archetype, a matrix, the very essence of Ukrainian ethnos as distilled through the centuries of oral and literary tradition. In this sense, the protagonist is non-existing; he is an idea rather than a living being. It is not coincidental, for example, that "phenomenal" Khoma at the peak of his "fame" was compared not to prominent contemporaries, but to historical figures, dead long ago (Hutsalo 8). Notwithstanding all the clear temporal/historical "markers" (such as the context of the Soviet reality, collective farming, typical elements of bureaucracy etc.), the space of the village appears oddly atemporal, archaic, and frozen in time.

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[84] Also see Tarnashynska's article, which deals in part with the construction of space in the chimerical novel. Although she resorts to the examples from Valerii Shevchuk's prose, her commentary can be extended to other writers of the genre. Of particular interest is her drawing an analogy between Shevhuk's "microuniverse" and the spacial relations in the works of Faulkner.

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[85] Once again, see the dissertation of Balinska-Ourdeva (2003) for a good overview of the problem.

In discussing the problem of ethnography and the "whimsical" in the chimerical novel, some critics trace the roots of the tradition to Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (see Lohvynenko 7). In the context of the Ukrainian literary tradition the emphasis is placed on the unmistakable influence of Ivan Kotliarevsky's *Eneida*, a 1798 travesty of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and also later works of Mykola Hohol'/Nikolai Gogol, a nineteenth-century Ukrainian author who wrote in Russian and has been traditionally appropriated by the Russian canon (Pavlshyn 2000; also cf. Pohribnyj 1980). Kotliarevsky's folkloric-parodic rereading of Virgil primarily served the goal of "creating a rallying-myth for the deculturated Ukrainian social elite and nascent intelligentsia and thus initiating their transformation into a literary audience ripe for romantic nationalism" (Pavlyshyn 2000, 108; also 1985); it, therefore, fulfilled a particular socio-cultural need at the definitive moment in the development of Ukrainian nationhood. In this context the role of the burlesque had a positive implication: it emphasized the vitality and energy emanating from the national spirit and facilitated the reception of a major narrative of national significance (primarily by means of a popular form, the use of vernacular, and the easily recognizable intertextuality and parody of one the major texts of European civilization). On the other hand, some thirty years later, Gogol's treatment of Ukrainian ethnos, although undisputably romantic, was also, in the words of Pavlyshyn, "dismissive to the point of caricature" (ibid., 109). In my opinion this statement oversimplifies Gogol's reading of Ukrainian ethnos. Being Ukrainian by birth, Gogol, however, never spoke from within the culture itself; his romanticism remained largely imperial as he himself was primarily a product of the Russian empire. Gogol's fondness for Ukrainian ethnomaterial, as well as the "whimsicality" of his Ukrainian prose was informed in part by the exotic "otherness" of the "little Russia"; his critical distance was an inherent aspect of the imperial cultural reading.[86]

Although the above influences were very important in the formation of the chimerical tradition (in particular, intertextual links to Gogol can be found in many texts of the genre), the chimerical novel reflects a qualitatively new (re-)reading of ethnicity rather than a repetition of the long-established cliches.[87] The archaic, old-world stagnant narrow-mindedness of the world of Iablunivka represents a dead-end path, a microcosm stuck in the labyrinths of history. Even though Hutsalo's trilogy flaunts a polyphony of discourses, it is the excessively folkloric discourse of Iablunivka that symbolizes the closed circle. Thus, for example, in *Parad planet* the narratives of world mythology, Eastern philosophy, astronomy, physics, and genetics, Middle Eastern studies, Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as long enumerations of biological species, tongue-in-cheek academic discussions of the "metaphoric world view," comments on opera and ballet performances (and the list can go on) invade the discursive space of Iablunivka only to collapse into inevitable folk cliches. Although it is the sheer quantity and heterogeneity of these discourses that makes them absurd, the effect is further enhanced by the juxtaposition of high versus low, where it is the "low" that subordinates what is conceived of as the traditionally "high." Overall, it is hard to agree that the genre "promoted a deprecatory provincial self-stereotyping" (Pavlyshyn 2000, 110); it, rather, parodied already established stereotypes of representation of rural life or the representation of Ukrainian culture itself in an exclusively rural context. The burlesque in Hutsalo is not only an anti-romantic and post-romantic but also a post-modern deconstruction of the national space.[88] It is easy to see, however, how the Soviet criticism failed to see beyond the surface: even with its ambivalent two-tieredness, the novels remained primarily a perfect example of "people's" literature.

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[86] Gogol's conceptualization of Ukrainian history and culture and his use of folklore, although relevant in the context of the twentieth-century chimerical novel, cannot be given a fair review because of the sheer scope and complexity of the problem. For a more comprehensive treatment of the issue see Ilnytzkyj 2000 and 2002. See also chapter "Nikolai Gogol's Ukraine" in Shkandrij (105-16) and Berehulak's article "Gogolian Myth and the Colonial Ethos."

[87] Cf. Pavlyshyn's comment that "[t]he whimsical novel ... was in almost every case an anachronistic reactivation of the old Kotliarevsky mania" (2000, 108).

The Role of the Fantastic

The fantastic is used extensively in the genre of the chimerical novel and is an inherent part of what makes it distinct. In Hutsalo's trilogy the use of the fantastic ranges from pure folklore magic to elements of fantasy and science fiction. Already in the early 1980s, some scholars of postmodernism claimed that the fantastic is at the very core of the postmodern and that it"for the first time in history determines the character of all the elements of fiction, or, to be precise, that of the fictional situation itself, which disintegrates into aspects" (Hofmann 1982, 362-63). If the discourse of Enlightenment can be seen as the last epistemological order or *épistème* that is still relevant to our contemporaneity, its underlying basis undoubtedly is the metanarrative of "reason" or "rationality" (see, for example, Habermas 1983, 1990). In his *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault observes a distinct link between the rise of the discourse of rationalism and the literature of the fantastic (cited in D'haen, 1997, 284). In the scholarship of the last decades, the modern fantastic has been conceptualized in a two-fold way: as a discourse of resistance ("structurally and semantically, the fantastic aims at dissolution of an order experienced as oppressive and insufficient," Jackson 180, cited in D'haen 1997, 284-85) or as an escapist medium (see Monleón for a comprehensive treatment of this approach). According to D'haen, in the broader sense the fantastic can be conceptualized as either a form of resistance to rationalism or as the projection of rationalism's fears; in any case, however, "it marks a profound crisis of the West's cultural order *from the inside*" (1997, 285, emphasis in text).

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[88] Even today the terms are not anachronistic. Romantic conception of ethnicity is still very much alive in Central and Eastern Europe; this holds particularly true for Ukraine with its centuries-long colonial history, where the post-colonial desire to recover the "roots" and to reclaim the "origins" is especially strong.

The fantastic in Hutsalo's trilogy is not developed enough to become truly escapist; the frantic tempo of the succession of tales and the fast change of the various fantastic acts and occurrences does not allow the reader to linger in (and on) them long enough. The fantastic is unordered, segmented and disjointed; it can be claimed the fantastic itself is "irrational" to the extent that it does not wish to sustain its own validity within the fictional world. Hutsalo's fantastic prose posits itself primarily as a discourse of opposition and a commentary on the imposed rationality (interpreted as "irrationality"?) of the world outside Iablunivka, or Iablunivka itself to the extent that it represents the system (bureaucracy, ideological structures, failing economy etc.). The author develops a distinct anti-realist platform, emphasizing both the "un-reality" of the situation and its irrationality. In more concrete terms, Hutsalo's chimerical prose was a commentary on and a response to both socialist realism, with its programmatic structuralism and the demands for "objective"analysis of socio-historical processes, and the totalitarian system on the whole. With the agency of the fantastic, his fictional world explodes to defy openly all logical, empirical, rational foundational systems, and the language itself becomes a reality-building block.

Although some scholars prefer to see the chimerical prose of the 1960s - 1980s as a largely conformist discourse (cf. Pavlyshyn 2000, 106), the reason for such readings is the critical foregrounding of the thematic, surface-level structures at the expense of the underlying subtexts.[89] One has to remember that the chimerical novel did not belong with underground literature and was never meant to be part of the underground opposition; it was a legitimate part of the Soviet literary structure and, thus, it had to work from within the system and utilize – at least in part – the code and inventory of this very system in order to subvert it (cf. the very similar phenomenon of "sotz-art" in Russia during the same period). The recognizable code of the Soviet reality constitutes an important, moreover, mandatory part of the setting for most of these texts, which were very convincingly "populist." At the same time, however, in works such as Hutsalo's trilogy there was very little glorification of the system, if any, and it would be very hard indeed not to read it as a scathing parody, particularly from the vantage perspective of the post-Soviet history. The protagonist himself, with all his encyclopedic erudition (that has rather mysterious origins) and marvelous powers is a marginal, unsettled figure within the social microsystem of the collective farm: he is "старший куди пошлють," or what comes the closest to the original in English translation – a "senior errand boy." But maybe that is precisely why he belongs on the margins and will never become part of the system – because he is a profoundly asystemic phenomenon, forever oscillating between the unreality, irrationality of his own world and equal unreality and irrationality of the "objective" world outside. The grand narrative of the discourse of socialism is consistently brought down, trivialized and ridiculed throughout. Such, for щexample, is the exaggeratedly grandiose act of "ex-communication" of Khoma from the farm barn; when he, with his usual simple-minded zeal tries to get back to work, various physical means, including a restraining shirt, are used to enforce the punishment. Although the scene is full of humourous undertones, the reference to the way "anti-social" elements were treated in the Soviet system is not so subtle.

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[89] Some authors had to resort to a positive representation of certain aspects of the Soviet system or history generally. For example, the earliest novel of the genre by Ilchenko, a historical fantasy, utilized the idea of the seventeenth-century political unification of Ukraine and Russia as an event of historical significance and clearly conceptualized it as one singularly important positive turn in Ukrainian history; such reading had always remained very unpopular in Ukraine and yet it was politically correct in the context of imperial Russia.

Revisiting the problem of the critique of ethnos and the agency of resistance in Hutsalo's trilogy, it can also be argued that his construction of ethnicity plays a double function. On the one hand, it betrays the obvious limitations of the project of "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) in the context of the discourse of modernity; on the other hand, however, along with the fantastic, the national space constitutes that eternal, ahistorical, atemporal continuum that resists appropriation and counteracts the systemic discursive mechanism of the official culture.

Some Latin American Analogies

The collocation of the above two factors – the fantastic and the ethnic – along with the specificity of certain conventions, such as spatio-temporal relationships, makes it possible to place Ukrainian chimerical prose in the broader context of the similar phenomena in other literary systems. In particular, it is hard not to draw a parallel between the discussed genre and the Latin American magic realism. Although the use of the term in its potential comparative applicability to Ukrainian literature has been scarce, one of the recent substantive studies on Ukraine in the context of Russian imperial discourse notes that the postmodern moment in this culture was conditioned "by alternative and countercultural publications [in the underground press]... and by the appearance of a strong magic realist trend in novel writing" (Shkandrij 262). Even though the author does not elaborate further, the implication of the chimerical prose is quite clear. If the necessity of transference of the term of magic realism – or even its applicability – on the Ukrainian ground may be disputed, the common denominator between the two phenomena as literary practices of "imagination of resistance" remains indisputable. In the broader context of postcolonial theory it is argued that within the Western discourse such narratives of magic or fantastic imagination are among few viable mechanisms of socio-cultural counteraction:

> In the cases [of countries with indigenous peoples], writers were and are able to challenge European perspectives with their own metaphysical systems. In areas [with non-indigenous peoples -- Canada, Australia, New Zealand], there are no such formulated systems which may be recuperated to challenge the imported or imposed European one, and here writers have had to act subversively through what Michael Dash has termed "the counter culture of the imagination." (Tiffin 173)

Contemporary magic realism as a genre and a world view has spread to include not only virtually all geographical regions but also particular problematics such as gender (feminist magic realism) and race as well as discourses of various minorities. It is, however, the original Latin American magic realism with whom Ukrainian chimerical novel shares a reaction to both modernity and modernism in a "dialectic between the 'center,' which avowed the failure of its own premises, and the 'periphery' or 'margin,' which acknowledged that avowal and failure and contrived its own counter-narrative upon them" (D'haen 1997, 289). From this perspective, it is the spatio-temporal construction of the (ethno)space that acquires primary importance in that it insists on its unity, meaning and coherence – albeit on its own terms – in an act of counter-discourse. For instance, one of Marquez's quintessential tales of Latin America, "The Sea of Lost Time" (the title itself being significant), represents simultaneous desire and universal apathy, speech and silence, self-sufficiency and profound alienation constitute the very locus of historical tensions. The world of "lost time" is there and not there; it is aware of the "other" world outside. However, there are no real points of intersections between the two dimensions, and the intrusions from outside do not change the course of events in the protagonists' lives. Although magic realism is most often described in terms of alternatives histories, it is just as often preoccupied with a non-linear (ahistorical) construction of time and space. Marquez' world is non-linear just as is that of Hutsalo's trilogy because their construction of primordial ethnos does not accept the linearity and sequential chronology of history. In particular, Hutsalo's world rejects the rigid construct of (official) historical narrative through the enclosure by/in the ethnodiscourse, which is much more pronounced than in Marquez.

Other Examples of the "Comical" Chimerical Genre

Although in the discussion of the first strand of the chimerical novel I have used Ievhen Hutsalo as a representative author – primarily because of the idiosyncrasy of his style – it should be noted that other writers of the "carnivalesque" (or "comical," according to Pavlyshyn's classification) direction can be placed in a more traditional context of postmodernist conventions. Thus, for example, Pavlo Zahrebelny's novel *Levyne Sertse* (1977), which appeared earlier than Hutsalo's trilogy, is an excellent example of a deconstructive approach to the novelistic genre. Zahrebelny questions and parodies a variety of discourses, styles and genres, creating a mozaic-like, fragmented narrative. Among the objects of parody an informed reader can find other conventions, such as the cliched and trivialized love-plot and, generally, the genre of popular romance, although the author keeps frustrating the readers' expectations and forces them to question the very plausibility of the events and characters. The narrative includes pointedly useless "lectures" and pieces of information on a number of "learned" and not so learned subjects, which in themselves constitute a parody of an academic, scholarly discourse. The novel structure is non-linear (the chronology of chapters is not properly sequenced and the reader is expected to reconstruct the events). The author writes himself into the novel by giving his name to the narrator – and at the same time creating the narrator's alter ego. The narrative includes some obvious and implicit intertextuality as well as elements of non-fiction (the author's real name/persona, the author's contemporaries – writers and literary scholars, etc.). Arguably, beyond the complex, multilayered parody of the novel the closest object of parody the author really had in mind all along was the genre of the chimerical novel itself (see the analysis of this novel in Pavlyshyn 2000, 111). Zahrebelny's prose also manifests a distinct two-tieredness of the postmodernist style: it caters equally successfully to two types of audiences – one that enjoys a light-hearted, engaging plot and an element of entertainment, and the other that is more appreciative of the subtle narrative game that the author initiates with the reader. Such a game calls for a more informed reader who has the tools for deciphering the double-codedness and reading the subtextual commentary.

Valerii Shevchuk

Throughout his creative career, Shevchuk oscillated between the rather extreme poles of various degrees of realism and the use of the mythological and fantastic; it is, however, the use of the latter elements that came to constitute the distinctive feature of his style. Referred to as a surrealist and magic realist (which, incidentally, would call for a qualification of both terms), he definitely belongs within the second strand of the development of the chimerical novel with its emphasis on history, mythology and metaphysics as well as a distinct absence of the burlesque "carnival" and of the comic element of the first group of chimerical writers (cf. Pavlyshyn's classification of this subgenre as the "mysterious" chimerical novel; see 2000).

Notwithstanding the fact that Shevchuk might certainly be indebted and linked to the chimerical tradition beginning still in the 1960s, he at the same time remains a unique author, having carved a separate niche in the post-1950s literary scene in Ukraine. Although some of the aspects of this analysis can potentially be applicable to his many other writings, it is not my goal here to make any generalizing claims as to Shevchuk's entire creative work that remains too complex and diverse.[90] Instead I will focus on his lesser-known novel (or rather *povist'*, a "short novel") *Ptakhy z nyvydymoho ostrova* (*Birds from the Invisible Island*, 1989) published along with two shorter "novellas" *Spovid'* (*The Confession*) and *Mor* (*The Plague*) in a collection that received less publicity. The blurb brings the three works together as belonging in a "cycle" written in the genre of the "historical fantastic." The novel in question is of interest primarily because it is highly representative of the body of his writing that belongs to the chimerical tradition; it has also received virtually no coverage in academic literature. To analyze the novel in the context of the postmodernist theoretical framework I will adopt, as a working premise, McHale's model of postmodernist poetics (which was briefly mentioned in the above discussion of Lem).

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[90] See Pavlyshyn (2000) for an overview of some of Shevchuk's other works in the context of the development of chimerical genre.

If in Hutsalo's trilogy, history is conspicuously and pointedly absent, Shevchuk incorporates the presence of history as the foundational basis of his fiction. In Shevchuk's novels history permeates everything: it is intricately woven into the plot and it is in the elaborate setting and the very atmosphere that shapes his fictional worlds. The historical background for the novel is set sometime in the sixteenth century and presents some fairly plausible details of the period. The protagonist of the novel is a captive cossack Olizar, who had been enslaved by the Turks for eight years. When the slaves stage a revolt and manage to seize the galley, they get to the shores of Spain. After traveling across Europe, he finds his way back to his homeland only to end up in a mysterious castle allegedly owned by kniaz' (prince) Bilynskyj and inhabited by the prince himself and a dozen of other members of the household. One peculiar thing about what Olizar thinks of as only his temporary refuge is that there is no escape from the castle back to the "outside" world. There are very few details as to what the castle's inhabitants can be, except for the obvious realemes that would designate Ukrainian nobility setting and the hints that they might belong to the Socinians, a protestant sect of the end of the sixteenth – beginning of the seventeenth century. The details of Olizar's life in Turkish captivity and his journey home are not presented as a separate or parallel story but rather incorporated into the main narrative as a series of flashbacks of his memory, discrete episodes (some more coherent than others) that have to be put together by the reader. Shevchuk's novel provides some insight both into the construction of fictional space in a postmodernist narrative and its implications for the construction of other categories, such as national space and national history.

Ontological Landscaping and Possible Worlds

McHale's definition of postmodernism, developed primarily in his *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), places main emphasis on the importance of the new conceptualization of ontological dimension in a fictional narrative. Borrowing Roman Jacobson's concept of the dominant, he advances the idea of the ontological dominant as the main thematic and structural characteristic of the postmodernist narrative. Although the McHalean model is not universal and has its limitations, it is a useful analytical tool; it is also interesting in that it attempts to translate into more concrete terms the epistemological shift that arguably occurred in postmodern culture – the move away from the tradition of Enlightenment towards the so-called "post-cognitive" episteme (1986; 1992, 32-35; see also Higgins 1978, 1984). McHale is certainly not original in his attention to the onotlogical aspect of the construction of narrative. Much earlier, phenomenologist Roman Ingarden in his seminal *Literary Work of Art* (1931) pursued an inquiry into the issue of internal ontological complexities of the text, claiming that ontological status of the text is heteronomous, that is, it both depends on the act of reading/consciousness of the reader to activate its ontology and is autonomous in its own right. In the 1980s the discussion was continued by Thomas Pavel, who explicated the fictional ontology as a "theoretical description of a universe" and introduced the concept of the ontological landscape of culture; applied to the fictional text this concept implies complex ontological layering of multiple worlds/universes (1982, 1986, especially Chapter 3). Thus, McHalean use of the notion of ontology is grounded in the theoretical propositions of Ingarden and Pavel, who have adapted "concepts from modal logic ('possible worlds') to the description of fictional worlds," with Pavel's working definition of an ontology as "a theoretical description of *a* universe" (my emphasis, McHale 1986, 75). This model allows for a potential plurality of modes of being, of universes, undermining any positivistic grounding of *the* universe. For McHale, postmodernist ontological landscape means primarily *anarchic* landscape of worlds (emphasis on the plural), that is worlds that are not defined by an hierarchical relation (for example, one ontology within another, an arrangement similar to that in traditional metafiction or Chinese-box structure). In his comprehensive analysis of a substantive body of post-modernist fiction McHale focused, among other things, on the construction of pluralist or polyphonic ontologies, defined primarily by discursive boundaries. The problem of construction of a fictional ontological reality also participates in a larger discussion. Ontological landscaping is comparable to the so-called "social construction of reality" and social constuctivism, an influential sociological theory advanced by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966). According to this approach, which in many ways parallels Foucauldian analysis, reality is a collective fiction, constructed and maintained through various types of social interaction and processes of institutionalization. Of particular significance here is the emphasis on language as the primary medium of social construction, which recontextualizes what is perceived as solid, opaque, permanent reality as a mere collection of discourses. The socially constructed reality of fiction is a complex mosaic of various subuniverses of meanings, ideologies, world-views (cf. Bakhtin's polyphony).

In his novel Shevchuk is concerned not just with a self-sufficient ontological game, but also, and more importantly, with the social construction of fictional reality. His narrative is meaningful not only in the sense of abandoning the model of a unitary fictional world for the model of postmodernist anarchic landscape, but also in the context of how it relates and contributes to the construction of social reality and how it participates in the discourse on national space, national identity and national history.

Foregrounding the ontological aspect of the fictional construct comprises the main focus of Shevchuk's novel where he very effectively implements what is alternatively referred to as a device of "zone" (McHale 1987, ch.3; 1992, 137-39) or possible-world construction. According to Hrushovsky (1984), one of the possible-world theorists and McHale's predecessors, all literary texts involve a "double-decker" structure of reference: an external plane of reference which implies the objective world, including the body of historical knowledge, philosophy, science, or, "authentic" texts; and the internal plane of reference, or semantic continuum constructed in and by the text itself. Within this world there is possibility of a subworld, a doubly fictional construct, which, however, does not belong in the hierarchy of narrative levels (as, for example, in metafiction); it is also not a product of a character's consciousness (as in a dream or imagination) – rather, it constitutes an autonomous space. Shevchuk's novel is based on the construction of such a "zone" or autonomous ontology, which fundamentally affects the protagonist's perception and (dis)orientation within the framework of the novel's fictional world; his main state can be defined as a perpetual ontological doubt. Constantly oscillating/flickering between the real and unreal – although the two are hopelessly blurred, Olizar desperately attempts to make sense of the world he found himself in:

> Він намагається втримати тверезий глузд, свідомість себе, свідомість того, що живий світ і світ його марень – не одне й те ж; дивний острах підповз до серця ... : а може, подумав Олізар, вже нема світу живого, тільки маревний? (193)[91]
>
> Не було ніякого повстання, і всієї тієї довгої мандрівки, був сон, а може, й казка (216)[92]

The space of the castle is simultaneously a "sea," a mirage, and a space of dreams; the castle is alternatively on an island in that "sea" or in the steppe/prairie; their world is an egg (with no outside world?); there is a constant dichotomization of "here" versus "there" and "our" world versus "their" world. Shevchuk continuously plays with overlapping of fictional spaces; thus the girl in the castle that Olizar seems to feel close to appears to be a bird whom he saw earlier in his dreams. The narrative has no unified center of consciousness, and all ontological layers are of equal status and value in the sense that none of them precedes the other (for example, the identifiable space of the "outside" world eventually stops functioning as an external point of reference).

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[91] "He us trying to retain his common sense, his awareness of himself, his awareness of the fact that the real world and the world of his hallucinations is not the same thing. A strange fear crept into his heart ...: could it be, thought Olizar, that the real world is no more, and the dreamworld is all there is?" (here and further all translations of Shevchuk are mine).

[92] "There was no uprising of any sort, no all that long journey; there was just a dream, or maybe even a wondrous tale."

The process of ontological construction, however, is curiously double-tiered in more than one way, and is inherently linked to the social construction of reality. The latter development takes place between the two competing discourses: that of Olizar, and (resorting to Lyotard's concept) the grand narrative of the castle's universe. In observing the status of both worlds it is interesting to note that the presumably real or "objective" world from which Olizar came is virtually absent from the novel's narrative and is instead represented by the protagonist's highly fragmented and episodic story about his life in the Turkish captivity and his escape from it. Throughout the entire development of the plot, he is involved in the act of story-telling – a source of indefatigable interest of the castle's inhabitants. Olizar becomes a parodic rereading of the myth of Shekherezade (specifically, in its male Ukrainian version); he is forced to keep his tale alive in order to please his masters and save his own life. It is consistently not clear whether his listeners can relate to his outside experiences or not. Olizar's reality is gradually fading away and is only available to him through his memories and his story-telling. On the other hand, the castle's "otherworldliness" and unrealness is ironically the only real physical dimension that is accessible to the protagonist. The discourse represented by the castle's universe deserves special attention. It is autonomous in the sense that it defies any definition through the external references (i.e. the "outside" world), but is also controlled by the residents of the castle: "ми захотіли стерти видимі і невидимі, але навіщось створені богом межі" (227).[93] Here Shevchuk displays some distinct intertextual associations with Kafka, Borges and Eco. In particular, his possible world is highly reminiscent of Borges' Tlönian civilization (from his "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius") that came into being as a result of a scholarly endeavour to create a complete multi-volume encyclopedia of a fictional civilization. In the end, material objects from this imaginary world begin to consistently appear in different parts of the globe, and although the narrator allows for a possibility of a prank, there is a distinct fear that the world can be eventually absorbed through the invasion of the alien discursive reality. Likewise, Shevchuk's castle is a separate universe in its own right whose validity is legitimated entirely by its own autonomous philosophy, science, complete with the juridical system of discipline and punishment (the tools of universe-maintenance). Like a Lyotardian grand narrative that escapes any possibility of pragmatic verification, but rather is "legitimated" through its constituent microdiscourses, the castle's discursive foundation is a strong comment on a constructed character of any coherent body of knowledge; thus, on closer scrutiny, the castle's science appears to be a pseudo-science, philosophy – a collection of tales.

Of significance in the novel is the evolution of the relation between the two worlds. If in the beginning there seems to be a distinct ontological hierarchy and the castle's space appears to be merely an ontological fragment, an "island," and part of the protagonist's reality (since Olizar comes from "outside"), eventually its presence comes to negate the external world. The protagonist with his – now remarkably powerless and useless – beliefs in reason and free will becomes entrapped in the discursive reality constructed by the castle's inhabitants. It is a simulated reality, a reality of pure external attributes; moreover, this simulated world includes another sub-level of simulation. To punish Olizar for expressing his dissent (which essentially comes down to his interpretation of his status in the castle as a captive), the prince orders the construction of a part of a Turkish galley to recreate the protagonist's original or "authentic" conditions of captivity in the "real" world. Rowing in a simulated Turkish galley was meant to provide him with the simulated feeling of freedom within the walls of the castle once he finishes his (real) work at the end of the day. The situation involves multiple ironies, primarily the prince's recontextualization of the former condition of captivity as a possible illusion of freedom – because Turkish slavery was part of Olizar's past experiences in the outside world. In the end any semblance of Olizar's autonomous consciousness almost disappears, becomes part of the eternal ontological hesitation, and the external world is becoming subsumed by the discursively constructed possible world through a complex layering of simulacra; the protagonist remains captive within the labyrinth of simulations, and so does the reader.

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[93] "We wanted to erase visible and invisible, but for some reason created by God, boundaries."

Construction of National Space

Although it should be acknowledged that all literature presents a quintessentially simulative, "virtual" experience, the techniques of manipulating this experience can radically differ. Thus, the mimetic conventions of realism present a totally different kind of simulation than a range of devices within the scope of anti-realist tradition. Shevchuk's construction of ontological space as an identifiable location is associated primarily with a distinct ethnic space, and the author's method constitutes a combination of both realist and anti-realist conventions. Notwithstanding the fact that the space in the novel is clearly and intentionally identifiable within the framework of the national Ukrainian space, it at the same time does not belong in the usual/normal universe (for instance, of Ukrainian history and geography as we know it). Thus, for example, the location of the castle remains curiously mysterious. Although it reminds the reader of the historical setting primarily in Western Ukraine, the mention of the steppe associates it with the eastern plains. The combination of the topoi of sea and castles does not belong in any real geographical part of Ukraine of the period. The use of anachronisms further enhances the fundamental vagueness of the constructed national space (i.e. traditional folk setting associated with pre-modernity is juxtaposed with the use of some technological devices that cannot be identified either by the protagonist or by the reader). D'haen, commenting on the use of the fantastic in European versus indigenous culture, contends that "[t]he Eurocentric variant uses the unreal to constitute an alternative reality that remains alternative and that is ultimately the creation of western rationalism, albeit of its crisis, i.e., of western language turned against itself" (1997, 287). In Shevchuk this broader aspect of the significance of constructing an alternative universe is also combined with a more local interest in mind, and namely, constructing of an alternative national space.

Although Shevchuk differs from the magic realists in his use of the fantastic, he is certainly comparable to them in his construction of the fictional world and in the way it relates to the national space. In the way similar to Marquez who uproots and suspends the national space in a sort of an anti-universe, Shevchuk creates a simulated national space in a manner that drastically departs from the tradition of the comical chimerical novel or earlier traditions. If in the classical romantic or realist text, the authenticity of ethnic details is value-laden, in Shevchuk's heterocosms their ontological and cultural boundaries are set by empty signifiers and markers, particularly folkloric realemes, that signal the reader that this fictional world belongs within a certain national/ethnic space. Such realemes are elements of the dialectal language, details of clothing, music, references to folk medicine, folk superstitions etc. (This approach of critical distance to the ethnic/folkloric material also holds true for many other writings of Shevchuk, including the above-mentioned novellas that comprised the quoted collection.) At the same time, however, for all its slightly superficial, simulated appearance (a mere collection of essential topoi), the constructed world appears to be a distinct nation-state complete with its sacred books and theology (along with the names of "authentic" authors and their works), its religion, philosophy and science.

What appears important in the discussed novel is that Shevchuk resorts not to Western European medieval, renaissance or later historical periods so popular in the genre of the historical novel, but uses rustic historical Ukrainian setting as a default background. Here Ukrainian-ness is taken out of the context of funny provincialism, as is the case with many novels of the comic chimerical genre. Shevchuk's narrative masterfully juxtaposes the local and the universal, the space of the folkloric (low culture) and the space of historical nobility (high culture). This brings us to another aspect of

Shevchuk's novel that becomes significant in the context of the present discussion – the role of history.

(De-)Construction of History

McHale alongside with Linda Hutcheon viewed the genre of historical phantasy as a quintessentially postmodernist genre that dismantled history as another grand narrative, bared the mechanism of construction of historical knowledge and claimed that history shares its foundational narrative qualities with myth and literature. Shevchuk's play with history fits well with what Hutcheon designates as historiographic (meta)fiction (1988). Olizar's narrative which represents the "objective" history, the true events (both within his reality and the reader's knowledge of the historical period) is ironically just a "story," and the act of story-telling is consistently emphasized by the author. One of Olizar's listeners refers to his narrative as "чудна казка" (197) or "казка" (which is a tale, even a tale of magic with a lot of supernatural adventures). The two competing narratives in the novel, which were mentioned above, and the two worlds that they represent, comment on the relativity of history as viewed from different perspectives. Another important element of the representation of history is the fact that it is consistently rendered subjective through the first-person narrative and, as such, it betrays a lot of gaps and indeterminacies.

In an overlap of the national and the historic, Shevchuk resorts to a lot of markers that signify both the space of ethnicity and a particular time period, and the cossack "nomenclature" belongs to the set of such historical and folkloric realemes. Although the

Cossack culture is an essential part of Ukrainian mythology and history, Shevchuk's narrative is clearly aimed at the demystification and demythologizing of the discourse of history. This consists primarily in the author's withdrawal from the glorification and elaborate adornment of the past (for instance, through the detailed description of action on battlefields, the life of court and nobility, the overall exotic, romantic setting). Historical reality is dreary and bleak, and there is very little glory in the narrator's past. Although Olizar tells his audience about the uprising of slaves against the Turks, his account is rather sketchy and, in fact, it does look more like "чудна казка," like adventures in tale of magic; it unmistakably lacks the pathos of a romantic historic narrative, and the density and emphatic "authenticity" of the realist one. Here grand historical landscape is largely reduced to the junkyards of history, and the history's face is presented as far from appealing.

One of the tensions that such a position presents is the inevitable clash between the postmodernist centrifugal tendencies and post- or anti-colonial distinctly centripetal movement towards the centre, towards the need for articulation of meaning and unity through the locus of history. In Shevchuk, however, his construction of history curiously fulfills this double mission: although the sublayers of meaning created at different levels of organization of his narrative are largely subversive, the mere fact of his usage of the default setting of Ukrainian historical past and the creation of an unmistakable Ukrainian-ness of his text, creates a powerful "centric" meaning and contributes to the construction of national identity that writes itself into the context of postmodernist discursivity.

II.3 Russian Postmodernism of the 1960s-1980s

General Overview

Russian postmodernism of the 1960s-1980s constitutes an extremely diverse and eclectic body of literature. The paradox of Russian culture of this period was that, although located at the very center of the empire, and thus inevitably enjoying the privileges associated with its metropolitan status (as compared to ethnic, non-Russian peripheries), it was at the same time severely confined by the limitations of the totalitarian regime.

The roots of Russian postmodernist literary culture go back to the tradition of modernism treated in the broadest sense of inclusion of both avant-garde and neoclassicism (cf. Mozejko 1998). Lipovetsky, one of the key contributors to the discussion of Russian postmodernism both in Russia and abroad, acknowledges the importance of the earlier modernist platform – which was quite strong in Russian tradition – and also points to the influence of such prominent figures as Bulgakov (in particular, his *Master and Margarita*, 1928-40) and Nabokov (see 1997, 108-20; 1999, 8-9; aslo cf. Skoropanova 1999, 75).[94] The discourse of socialist realism can be constituted as the other important source of Russian postmodernism. In a manner very similar to how Ukrainian authors of chimerical prose appropriated the official discourse, in Russia it was used to create a parodic and subversive counter-discourse (although the specific manifestation was very different). The phenomena of Russian conceptualism and sotz-art, originating in their dialogue with (or opposition to) the discourse of the official culture, belong to a distinct strand of this national postmodernism. They developed from the group of poets and artists known as "Lionozovo," who were active as early as the late 1950s. Conceptualism and sotz-art started in the 1960s and reached its peak in the early to mid 1970s largely in the poetry of Timur Kibirov, Vsevolod Nekrasov, Dmitri Prigov, Lev Rubinstein and the prose of Vladimir Sorokin, who remained the key figures of the movement and were published exclusively in samizdat or abroad. Although both conceptualism and sotz-art can be treated as phenomena of the same order (for example, this seems to be the contention in Moczałowa 1995, 126), they can also be differentiated (Skoropanova 1999, 212). Thus, according to Mikhail Epstein, "[a]s a school of medieval philosophy, contrary to realism, conceptualism assumed that concepts are self-sufficient entities which must be distinguished from external reality. ... They [conceptualists] understood that, in their country, there was no reality other than ideas" (1992, quoted in Kuznetsov 1997, 456). This definition echoes Epstein's theory of the simulacrum of Soviet reality as the source of Russian postmodernism (1995a, 1995b).

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[94] Although traditionally Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* – one of the masterpieces of the twentieth-century Russian literature – has been situated in the context of modernism (perhaps more from the point of view of literary chronology than because of any other considerations), this novel is a lot more complex and "precocious" in the sense of going beyond purely modernist preoccupations and experimentation with language and form; it can be designated as a bridge between the modern and the postmodern. Moreover, McHale, for instance, refers to *The Master and Margarita* as a postmodernist text, which, in the context of his study, situates the novel as one of the earliest examples of international literary postmodernism; he refers to it alongside with Julio Cortázar, John Barth, Ishmael Reed and Angela Carter (1987, 73, 78, 174). Also see Krysinski's (1988) discussion of Slavic metafiction in relation to

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postmodernism. In particular, the scholar emphasized the "dialectical and montage-like interweaving of structures, narratives, dialogues, descriptions, parables and allusions" in *The Master and Margarita,* as well as Bulgakov's playing with the structures of "fictious," "possible" worlds (76-77).

Sotz-art, on the other hand, "takes Soviet artistic style to a logical extreme, immersing socialist realist works in a new context with the aim of desecrating the original source" (Kuritsyn 1995, 55). Lists, catalogues, enumeration, quotationalism, intertextuality, irony, parody of Soviet nomenclature proliferate in the works of conceptualism and sots-art. For example, Sorokin's later short novel *Ochered'* (*The Queue*, 1983) is quite representative in the context of this inventory. The entire book consists of utterances/phrases heard in a queue, the queue itself being almost a metaphysical entity – with no beginning and no end, no clear purpose, no real human beings; it is a pure semiotic symbol, a void, yet a void that acquires strange meaningfulness in the context of the Soviet culture.

Another distinct literary trend of the period in question was historiographic metafiction or Soviet "meta-utopian" novel (see Clowes 1993) that deconstructs simultaneously the tradition of the utopian genre and the Soviet utopian consciousness. Among the works that can be situated within this development are Abram Tertz's *Liubimov* (*The Makepeace Experiment,* 1963), Alexander Zinoviev's *Ziiaiushchie vysoty* (*Yawning Heights*, 1976), Vladimir Voynovich's *Moskva 2042* (*Moscow 2042*, 1986) (cf. Lipovetsky 1999, 108), as well as the short prose of Vyacheslav Pietsukh and Viktor Erofeyev. The key texts of this tradition undoubtedly are Vasily Aksenov's *Ozhog* (*The Burn*, 1969-74) and *Ostrov Krym* (*The Island of Crimea*, 1981). The latter is a classical alternative history novel where Crimea is projected as a separate political – and geophysical (as it is implied by the title) – body that is situated in close proximity of the Soviet presence, and where the author engages in a complex play of the utopia/dystopia dynamic. The alternative history/historiographic model, based on the question "What if...?" questions the validity not only of the official history (i.e. the past), but also of the official present.

A brief overview of the first-wave Russian postmodernism cannot be complete without mentioning Andrei Siniavsky's novel *Progulki s Pushkinym* (*Walks with Pushkin*, 1966-71). Siniavsky engages in a playful deconstruction (some would say, desecration) of the foundational myth of Russian high culture – the figure of the greatest poet in the canon of Russian literature, Alexander Pushkin. The author's imaginary leisurely "walks" and conversations with the poet subvert many foundational structures – the national myth, the myth of canon, the myth of truth (in the academic discourse) and the myth of unity, coherence and continuity as ascribed to Russian culture through the canonicity of authors such as Pushkin. Another important text is Sasha Sokolov's *Shkola dlia durakov* (*A School for Fools*, 1971-73), a commentary on a schizoid imagination of an individual traumatized by the absurdity and futility of existence in the totalitarian reality (Skoropanova 1999, 283). Both works manifest a direct continuity of themes and motifs with Venedict Erofeev's *Moskva – Petushki* (*Moscow to the End of the Line*, 1969) and Andrei Bitov's *Pushkinskii dom* (*Pushkin House*, finished in 1971), the two novels that are discussed below in more detail. Erofeev's and Bitov's writing, while remaining quintessentially postmodernist in its technical inventory, is uniquely different and infused with cultural idiosyncrasy, representing a distinctly Russian paradigm of the early postmodern.

Venedict Erofeev

Erofeev's literary experimentation started with his early work *Blagovestvovanie* (1962), where he revisits/rereads the tradition of Nietzsche, particularly his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, from a parodic perspective. The genre of Erofeev's *Moskva – Petushki* is defined by the author himself as a "poema" (a narrative heroic poem), which places it in the tradition of the epics of Dante and Homer.[95] In this case, however, the heroic quest is decidedly unheroic and the journey is never completed. In the narrower context the novel can be placed in the long and rich tradition of Russian travelogue, which is usually linked to the spiritual quest for truth and search for social justice.[96] Erofeev's re-interpretation of either genre is a carnivalesque, de-sacralizing travesty with its links to the "festive tradition," to the blasphemous, to the "serious laughter" and the "ultimate questions of being" (Lipovetsky 1999, 66). In *Moskva – Petushki* a powerful impetus of spirituality comes through the "low" culture stratum, distilled through the layers of black humour, popular jokes and the traditional inventory of the Russian underground culture. Erofeev's carnivalesque is profoundly existential and tragic (it is a carnivalesque *noir* of sorts); it is not coincidental that in his dedication the author refers to the novel as "эти трагические листы" ("these tragic sheets/lines.") Unwittingly, it inverts and deconstructs Bakhtin's concept of the carnival and its healing laughter as a rite of renewal and re-birth.

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[95] The original title refers to the destination of one of the Moscow suburban train lines. Petushki is a small provincial town east of Moscow.

[96] Cf. the tradition of Radishchev, Nekrasov, Platonov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, A. Tolstoy among others (see Muraviev 1990, quoted in Skoropanova 1999, 148). Some scholars also link Erofeev to the tradition of Gogol in his *Dead Souls* (see Smirnova 1990, 59).

The distinct common motif in Sokolov's and Erofeev's novels is the extreme marginal perspective represented by these narratives, a voice from "underground," in a not so subtle intertextual connection with Dostoevsky's portagonist *Notes from Underground.* If in Dostoevsky, however, it is a typical revolt of a "small," insignificant, unsuccessful and ignored by everyone man (a traditional character in the nineteenth-century Russian realist literature) against the arrogant and alienated social environment, Sokolov's and Erofeev's deconstruction of reality is much more complex since it comes through the prism of a qualitatively different, altered perception. If in Sokolov's *Shkola dlia durakov* it is a schizophrenic vision of the world, in Erofeev's *Moskva – Petushki* the narrative represents a "confession" of a chronic alcoholic (in a more or less permanent drunken state). Ironically, these altered states of consciousness are capable of seeing and articulating the truth that is hidden or rather inaccessible through the state of "normalcy" in that it is inaccessible through the structured and organized processing of reality by sane and sober minds. The plot of Erofeev's novel (if indeed one may speak of a coherent plot in this case) is loosely shaped around the protagonist Venia's trip on a suburban train from Moscow to the small town of Petushki to visit his beloved. The actual time span of the story is not clear but it cannot be more than half a day to a day (taking into consideration the narrator's unreliability and the fact that he never reaches his destination). The narrative itself consists of the drunken rumblings of Venia, philosophizing about his love, his present and past life, sharing his thoughts about a variety of learned subjects and listing detailed recipes for exotic "cocktails"; his real memories are interspersed with hallucinatory visions (the degree of the narrator's soberness and thus the coherence of his story-telling varies throughout the novel). The protagonist talks sometimes to himself, sometimes to the reader in a manner very similar to Dostoevsky's narrator in *Notes from Underground* – constructing the reader and anticipating his response and argument; on occasion he talks to his fellow passengers on the train. In an interesting twist, the narrator shares the author's first and last name (Venia is a short form of Venedikt), which inevitably hints at the closeness of the narrative persona to the authorial self. The creation of an *alter ego* is always ambivalent and implies both the author's spiritual proximity to his character and an act of critical distancing from him (a look with a slant) through a dialogue with one's other self; although one must be careful with drawing direct parallels between the two Venedikt Erofeevs, many aspects of the novel are undoubtedly inspired by autobiographical details.[97]

Collapsing the World

One of the more powerful effects achieved by Erofeev's narrative in *Moskva – Petushki* is the radical deconstruction of the "outside" world (as opposed to the "inner" world of the protagonist, either hallucinatory or reflecting the actual reality) and creation of a meaningless, hostile void. This process of collapsing the world is multilayered and takes place on a number of levels. The narrative structure itself acquires particular significance through its simultaneous orderliness and deliberately amorphous, decentering attributes.

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[97] See, for example, the editor's extensive commentary in a recent Russian edition of Erofeev (Vlasov).

Venia's narrative is punctuated by train stops, and the names of train stations constitute its formal division into chapters, although there is no any logical correspondence between the formal narrative breaks and the developments within Venia's story (as a matter of fact, his narrative is commonly interrupted in the middle of a sentence to indicate the next train stop). The protagonist's physical progression (on a train) towards his destination – the dream space of love, inner peace, and salvation – is juxtaposed by the increasing confusion (regression) in his mind, disorientation, and inability to situate himself between the imaginary and real world. There are no clear transitions between the narrator's alcohol-induced visions and the segments of the narrative referring to the actual people/events. Venia's inner confusion, however, also reflects the absence of structure and reason in the "outside" world and its ultimate absurdity. Not only do the protagonist's attempts to make sense of the immediate reality inevitably fail because of his altered perception, some of his more "sober" observations and the actual memories of the past life reveal the fundamental absence of meaning and the existential void (cf. the description of his travel companions and their conversations, Venia's recollections of his life as part of the official "system" etc.). Venia's inability to maintain a focused narrative result in an eclectic, disjointed discourse where the outer semblance of structure is undermined by the inherent lack of coherence and meaning.

Distortion of reality is also achieved through the continuous deconstruction of the spatio-temporal dimension. The narrator's time continuum suspends and violates the laws of temporal relations; although the reader can deduce the approximate duration of the events in the novel, there is no real time in Venia's world, and a few minutes may equate eternity. Also irrational, almost metaphysical is the (de-)construction of spacial relations, which continues throughout the entire narrative, although the most significant is the play with metaphorical space of the two main destinations. Venia's existence oscillates between the topoi of Moscow (in particular, the Kremlin) and Petushki. His progression between the two places marks the distinct stages of hell, purgatory and heaven: "От Москвы – к Петушкам. Через муки на Курском вокзале, через очищение в Кучине, через грезы в Купавне – к свету и Петушкам. *Durch leiden – licht*" (54).[98] The "unreality" of many place-names that serve as formal chapter demarcators sound like a grotesque travesty of the Soviet reality (Hammer and Sickle, the Railway Railway Station, Electric Coals, Slough of Despond etc.), the only catch being that they are real, which doubles the ironic effect of these descriptors.[99] Although the narrator flees the horrors of his life in Moscow to find a refuge with his lover in her suburban haven, the train inexplicably makes a complete circle and brings him back to Moscow. (This development bears an almost mystical effect on Venia, although the reader understands that, being drunk, he simply slept through the station of his destination and was making a round trip.) The last few chapters of the novel bring together the names of both Petushki and Moscow ("Petushki. Sadovaya Ringroad," "Petushki. Kremlin. Monument to Minin and Pozharsky," "Moscow. Petushki"), superimposing both places, closing the vicious circle, emphasizing that the two became one for the narrator and that there is no escape (Venia meets his death in Moscow).

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[98] "From Moscow to Petushki. From the sufferings at Kursk Station, through the purgatory at Kuchino to the reveries at Kupavna – to the light and Petushki. *Durch leiden – licht*" (68). Here and further all original quotations from *Moskva – Petushki* are from Erofeev 2000; all translated quotations – unless specified as mine – are from Erofeev 1981.

"*Durch leiden – licht*": literally, "through sufferings – to the light." Some scholars see it as an intertextual link with the credo underlying Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth symphonies and the Overture "Egmont" (see Levin, 1996, 55, quoted in Vlasov 2000, 312).

[99] See the translator's preface to the quoted edition of *Moskva – Petushki* (Dorrell 1981, 2).

Both in the beginning and at the end of the narrative the Kremlin appears as the mythological centre of the discourse of the Soviet reality. Venia's obsession with the Kremlin stems from his living as part of the grand social myth yet never being able to locate and prove the "realness" of this central mythical construct:

> Все говорят: Кремль, Кремль. Ото всех я слышал про него, а сам ни разу не видел. Сколько раз уже (тысячу раз), напившись или с похмелюги, проходил по Москве с севера на юг, с запада на восток, из конца в конец, насквозь и как попало – и ни разу не видел Кремля. (17)[100]

The semiotic ghost of the Kremlin keeps haunting Venia throughout his misadventures in the city before and after his trip on the train, thus serving as a unifying element of the entire narrative. On some basic level, the lure of the Kremlin is similar to the archetypal quest for the enchanted place, which is not easy, if not impossible, to find, but which, once found, makes all wishes come true. The novel, however, does not parallel the resolution of a classical tale but rather that of one of its parodic rereadings, like that, for example, of *The Wizard of Oz*: upon reaching the coveted place, the heroes discover that the magic turns out to be nothing but a false promise and a simulacrum. The folk- and fairy-tale motifs constitute one of the more significant intertextual links; particularly important are the references to crossroads, typical of all Slavic folk-tales ("If you go down the left path, it will take you to ...; if you go down the right path, it will take you to ..."). The folk-tale hero's decision-making process emphasizes the significance of the choice in terms of its consequence. In a similar manner, the narrator in *Moskva – Petushki* is always lost in the capital city: that's how the reader finds him at the beginning of the narrative (trying to find his way to the railway station) and at its end (attempting to convince himself that it was Petushki, not Moscow, and later, trying to find his way through a labyrinth of unfamiliar streets and alleys while on a run from a gang that eventually hunts him down and brutally kills him). The repetition of the folk-tale cliche, however, underscores only the futility and meaninglessness of his desire to find the right path – or to escape the existential maze. In Venia's world there is no choice, and at the end, the narrator, forever confused in his drunken daze and forever at a crossroad, realizes the truth: "Если хочешь идти налево, Веничка, – иди налево. Если хочешь напараво – иди направо. Все равно тебе некуда идти. Так что уж лучше иди вперёд, куда глаза глядят" (112).[101] Ironically, he finds the Kremlin when he is least looking for it, but the moment of the intimation of the grand myth turns out to be just as trivial and meaningless as his death itself.

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[100] "Everyone talks about the Kremlin. I have heard about it from many people, but I have never seen it myself. How many times when drunk, or even crapulous, have I crossed Moscow, north to south, east to west, from one end to the other, through the centre, or any old way – but I have never seen the Kremlin" (7).

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[101] "If you want to go left, Venichka, go left. If you want to go right, go right. It's all the same because there is nowhere to go. Might as well head straight ...." (my translation).

Venia's alcoholic/narcotic culture and his phantasmagoric reality are just as important a part of the novel's fictional world as is the discourse of the official culture. In fact, the protagonist validates the outside world exclusively through his altered-mind experiences. This is emphasized not only by his actual physical condition, but also by the excessive focusing of his narrative on all matters related to the alcoholic culture (numerous recipes for home-made concoctions, descriptions of experiences both intensely physical and spiritual, etc.). Thus, for example, already in the opening pages of the novel, Venia's progression to the railway station is measured by the type and amount of alcohol he consumes along the way. Moreover, continuous representation of various elements of the Soviet reality and Soviet ideological maxims through the prism of Venia's perception and his constant preoccupation with staying high radically devalues the official discourse. Thus, in the representative example below, the elevated style of the opening statements (high culture) is juxtaposed with the incompatible – a cheerful reference to the nature and degree of Venia's addiction (the low, or rather, underground, illegal, unofficial culture) :

> Что самое прекрасное в мире? – борьба за освобождение человечества. А ещё прекраснее вот что (записывайте):
>
> Пиво жигулёвское – 100 г.
>
> Шампунь "Садко – богатый гость" – 30 г.
>
> Резоль для очистки волос от перхоти – 70 г.
>
> Клей БФ – 15 г.
>
> Тормозная жидкость – 30 г.
>
> Дезинсекталь для уничтожения мелких насекомых – 30 г.

> Все это неделю настаивается на табаке сигарных сортов – и подаётся к столу... (57)[102]

The first two sentences are an almost verbatim quote from the novel *How Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovskii (1935), a classic of the literary canon of the post-revolutionary period and Stalin years, and, more generally, of the canon of Soviet literature. The citation invokes the pathos of the revolution and the idealistic romanticism surrounding the first two decades of the state-building in the Soviet society. The book was familiar to every schoolchild and the quotation was certainly highly recognizable. Bringing together Ostrovskii's citation and Venia's recipe for his "esoteric" drink ridicules and denigrates the original context, and such appropriation and travestying of the metanarrative of totalitarian ideology constitutes one of the main means of the deconstruction of official discourse – the outer thematic and ontological frame of the novel.

Language plays a similar deconstructive role: in particular, this applies to the opposition of official, normative language in a variety of its manifestations (academic, intellectual, language of quotations) and the counter-normative language of underground. The persistence of this subversive code (slang and expletives) is significant in that it resists appropriation by the normative discourse and constitutes an autonomous, free-zone space where the official codification of social behaviour does not apply. Venia's use of expletives and the jargon of alcoholic culture creates a different discursive reality that not only counteracts the "outside" world but is also self-sufficient in its own right.[103] The notorious one-phrase chapter in *Moskva – Petushki* (see the previous footnote) is interesting primarily because the very absence – the semiotic void – acquires a meaning-generative value in view of the author's preface. In the context of the author-reader play this absence may be conceptualized rather as a negative presence because the reader is invited to participate in the game of the unsaid (and thus become part of Venia's anti-world). The use of a counter-normative discourse emphasizes primarily the impossibility of containing the absurd, meaningless world of the narrator's reality by means other than anti-language, which also becomes the only way to legitimate his truth.

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[102] What is the most beautiful thing in life? The struggle for the liberation of humankind. But this is even more beautiful (take it down):

Zhigulev beer – 100g
Shampoo "Sadko the Merchant" – 30g
Anti-dandruff shampoo – 70g
Liquid glue – 15g
Brake fluid – 30g
Insect repellent – 30g

Infuse some shag for a week – and serve... (my translation)

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[103] Erofeev's tongue-in-cheek preface to the novel gives a fairly good idea about the use of expletives and sets the tone of the entire narrative (the preface is reproduced in its entirety): "The first edition of *Moscow Circles* sold out fast, since it came out in only one copy [i.e. in *samizdat*]. Its publication invoked much undue censure over the chapter headed 'Hammer and Sickle to Karacharovo.' In my introduction to the first edition I advised all young ladies to skip the said chapter, since the words 'And then I had a drink' are followed by a page and a half of obscenities, and the entire chapter is composed of indecent expressions, except for 'And then I had a drink.' The only result of this honest admission was that all readers, and especially young ladies, immediately turned to the chapter headed 'Hammer and Sickle to Karacharovo,' leaving out all the preceding chapters and even the phrase 'And then I had a drink.' That is why I have decided to cut out all the foul language from this chapter. It is better so, since in the first place my book will be read in the proper manner, and in the second, no one will be offended" (Erofeev 1981, 5). In his 1989 interview Erofeev admitted that this original version of the chapter had never existed (Erofeev 2000, 124); the current version consists only of the words "And then I had a drink," although reading of it cannot be taken out of the context of the author's introduction.

The Archetype of "Holy Madness"

Throughout the novel the author blurs the demarcation line of many dichotomies and brings together distinct opposites. Thus, to name a few, Moscow (and, by extension, the whole totalitarian society) is both a mythical utopia and hell, Venia's beloved is both a saint and a whore, and his alcoholic addiction is simultaneously a sin and a redemption. Venia's character is also interesting in a broader context: he is the one who is being continuously judged and outlawed by the society, yet he is also the one who pronounces judgement against it[104]; he belongs to the lowest low of the social ladder, he is the ultimate "fallen" man, yet he unmistakably betrays all the signs of intelligentsia (cf. the frequent sophistication of his discourse, numerous quotes and complex intertextual allusions) – the thinking, radical intelligentsia that, in the Soviet reality, had no other place than underground.[105] At some point, Venia explicitly talks about his plight:

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[104] In a clearly recognizable Dostoevskian manner (cf. the narrator in *Notes from Underground*) Venia is self-deprecatory and constructs and anticipates the reader's conception of him: "Ну, конечно, все они считают меня дурным человеком. По утрам и с перепою я сам о себе такого же мнения. Но ведь нельзя же доверять мнению человека, который еще не успел похмелиться! Зато по вечерам – какие во мне бездны! – если, конечно, хорошо набраться за день, – какие бездны во мне по вечерам!" (25-26; "But of course, you think I'm no good. ... All right, then, I'm no good. I'll even go so far as to say that a man who feels like death in the morning [i.e. because of hangover], and in the evening is full of plans and dreams and strivings – such a man is no good at all. Bad mornings and good evenings are a sure sign of evil in a man," 22-23).

[105] The author of *Moskva – Petushki* himself was a prime example of such outlawed intelligentsia: a brilliant secondary-school student from Siberia, Venedikt Erofeev was immediately accepted to Moscow State University, one of the most prestigious post-secondary institutions in the country. After the first year he was expelled for his refusal to attend the military training program, which was compulsory at all Soviet universities and other post-secondary institutions. For a period of time Erofeev became an illegal alien in his own country – a person without identification and

> Господь, вот Ты видишь, чем я обладаю. Но разве *это* мне нужно? Разве по *этому* тоскует моя душа? А если б они мне дали *того*, рзаве нуждался бы я в *этом*? Смотри, Господь, вот: розовое крепкое за рупь тридцать семь... (26, emphasis in text)[106]

Venichka, an alcoholic, yet, in his oblivious drinking, an archetypal Russian "holy fool," the "wise," whose perception of the world is universal and all-encompassing, is an embodiment of the Russian alcoholic myth, so essential in the mythology of the underground culture (Kuritsyn 1996, 172). It is obvious, however, that the nature of protagonist's addiction is not just alcoholic, but also narcotic. Theorizing Venia's "otherworldly" perception, Kuritsyn suggests the transition from the modernist to postmodernist consciousness is similar to the transition from an alcoholic culture to a narcotic one. Alcoholic culture consists in imposing oneself on the world, it has no doubts in the integrity and the significance of "I." By contrast, narcotic culture does not change the world, it *perceives* it through the acuteness of all senses; moreover, one's own perception begins to be actively perceived. The shift of the values is geared towards existence of different personalities and multiple perspectives (ibid., 173-74). This "narcotic" vision of Venichka opens a grotesque and fantastic world (which,

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permanent residence, an alcoholic and a drifter who did odd heavy-labourer jobs in order to survive (see Skoropanova 1999, 145; Popov in Erofeev 2000, 10-11).

[106] "Lord, you see before you the sum of my possessions. But is *this* what I need? Is *this* the object of my soul's desire? *This* is what I have been given by men as a substitute for *that* which my soul desires! And if they had given me *that* would I have needed *this*? See for yourself, Lord – fortified rosé at a rouble 37..." (23, emphasis in text).

paradoxically, makes sense), richly interwoven with Christian symbols and complex intertextual associations. Venichka's hero transcends his temporal limitations and the boundaries of the postmodern text – he belongs in the Russian cultural space:

> The cultural branch of Russian holy craziness – with its impossible aesthetics, its ethical pathos of humility and meekness, and, simultaneously, its raging irreconcilability as expressed in special forms of spiritual rebellion... having come out of ancient Russian letters and been reinforced many times by Dostoevsky, truly seems to have found its continuation in Erofeev (the author and the hero). (Lipovetsky 1993/1994a, 71)

As Kuritsyn argues, Venichka is a Christ-like figure; he carries guilt – individual and collective – for all and everything, as well as a profoundly tragic sense of being that becomes an inherent part of his consciousness (1996). Continuing on the strong existential and spiritual impetus in Erofeev, Lipovetsky says that this text becomes "the transitional bridge from the spiritual instruction of the Russian classics to the unrestrained play of postmodernism: and the position of the holy fool combines so well both shores – the moral prophecy and the playful freedom" (1993/1994a, 73). According to this scholar's interpretation of the idea of Russian postmodernism as a particular "cultural craziness," associated with the primordial crazy/mad consciousness of the Russian cultural tradition, texts such as Erofeev's break all the boundaries erected between the postmodernist and traditional and classical culture, creating a unique cultural continuum.

Venichka's death is both physical and allegorical in that it signifies a condition or a state of being rather than an event: "Они вонзили мне свое шило в самое горло... Я не знал, что есть на свете такая боль, я скрючился от муки. Густая красная буква “Ю” распласталась у меня в глазах, задрожала, и с тех пор я не приходил в сознание, и никогда не приду” (119).[107] These concluding lines of the novel imply the continuation of the protagonist's voice/discourse after his death; they describe the condition of life-death, an in-between stage, where Venia's voice becomes the collective voice of permanent cultural “unconsciousness.”

“Close That Gap”: Intertextuality in the Dialogue of High and Low

The dynamics of high versus low culture appears to be a significant structural element in the series of many distinct binaries developed in the novel. If the entire life of Venia belongs in the extreme peripheries of society, he resists his own marginality by radically rewriting it. Thus, in the continuous reversal of high and low so characteristic of Erofeev, the narrator is re-construing his alcoholism by encoding it into the “high culture” context; in particular, his drinking becomes associated with high art (cf. the pretentious names of his outlandish “cocktails,” his usage in the context of alcohol consumption of the lexicon that is usually ascribed to art and different areas of intellectual inquiry, etc.). Although the effect of such parodic confusion of styles is largely humourous, it also blurs the clear demarcation line between the official high culture and Venia's “high” art of drinking:

> Пить просто водку, даже из горлышка, – в этом нет ничего, кроме томления духа и суеты. Смешать водку с одеколоном – в этом есть известный каприз,

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[107] “They plunged the awl straight into my neck. I never knew such pain could exist. I writhed and a thick red letter Y spread over my eyes, trembling. I lost consciousness. I have not come to since and I never shall” (182).

> но нет никакого пафоса. А вот выпить стакан "Ханаанского бальзама" – в этом есть и каприз, и идея, и пафос, и сверх того еще метафизический намек. (54)[108]

(The recipe for Canaan Balsam, of course, follows and is truly "metaphysical.") Throughout the novel, the act of drinking is commonly associated with piano music and an act of a concert performance: "Снова началось то же булькanье и тот же звон, потом опять шелестенье и чмоканье. Этюд до диез минор, сочинение Ференца Листа, исполнялся на бис..." (74).[109]

At the same time, however, the protagonist's discourse comprises a complex network of intertextual subtexts, allusions and associations (some examples of which have already been discussed) . The scope of intertextuality in the novel covers both Russian and international intellectual legacy from classical antiquity to the present time: Old and New Testament, St. Augustine, Roman law, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Goethe, Schiller, Corneille, Byron, Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Verlaine, Saint-Exupéry, Aragon, Triolet, Bulgakov, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Marx, Lenin, to name just a few sources.[110] The quotationalism of *Moskva – Petushki* is extremely complex, both accurate and deliberately distorting, clearly recognizable and sometimes obscure; it requires an informed, highly educated reader to make sense of the maze of hidden citations and allusions.[111] Intertextuality enhances the inherently playful and parodic nature of Eroffev's narrative, where nothing can be taken for its face value and everything is multifaceted and is leading somewhere else; his discourse explodes its own centeredness and defies any hermeneutic containment. If from the point of view of structure and narrative organization the novel presents a dichotomy of a semblance of formal organization and internal chaos, similarly, on the thematic plane, the deceptively simple low-cultural story is juxtaposed to the complex and sophisticated game of subtexts and allusions. This intentionally "disorderly" and disruptive narrative reflects what Lipovetskii conceptualizes as the philosophy of chaos.[112] Towards the end of the novel, the "increasingly illusory linearity of movement" (1999, 78) – as the space of the text becomes circular emphasizes also the increasingly chaotic quality of both external reality and – Venia's perception of it through the onset of his sickness (alcohol-induced fever). Erofeev's phantasmagoric and grotesque game serves both as a means of questioning the nature of reality and as a scathing critique and deconstruction of the socio-political system from within which his narrator was speaking.

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[108] "The drinking of vodka neat, even if it is straight from the bottle, promises nothing but toil and trouble. The addition of Eau de Cologne to vodka shows a certain style, but lacks all pathos. But the drinking of the tumblerful of Canaan Balsam is proof of style, ideas, pathos, and hints at the metaphysical" (69).

[109] "And the gurgling and tinkling began again, followed by rustling and smacking. An encore of the Etude in C-sharp minor by Franz Liszt" (103).

[110] For a more comprehensive (although not exhaustive) list of intertextual links in Erofeev see Skoropanova 2002, 103.

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[111] For a very good annotated edition of the novel, with detailed page-by-page commentaries on the intertextual allusions and sources in *Moskva – Petushki*, see Vlasov.

[112] Cf. the very title of one of Lipovetsky's studies: *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* (1999).

Andrei Bitov

Andrei Bitov's novel *Pushkinskii dom* [*Pushkin House*] represents a perspective directly opposite to Erofeev's description of the life in the gutter; it focuses on the problem of the Russian social elite – academic and artistic intelligentsia – and the issues of the Russian cultural space (continuity of culture, the meaning of canon, construction of high culture, etc.). Thematically, Bitov's *Pushkin House* presents some obvious parallels with Siniavsky's "heretical" deconstruction of the myth of the Russian national cultural icon. Just like Siniavsky in his *Walks with Pushkin*, Bitov makes Pushkin the central figure/symbol not only through the title itself, but also by means of multiple epigraphs to chapters, citations and intertextual allusions. Their parodic rereading of Pushkin, however, is not just a traditional postmodernist play with the canon and a desecration of the original, of the "source"; it is rather a rereading of the entire history of a culture based on the lengthy tradition of mythology and "un-reality." Here the dialogue with the literary past is primarily about the present – limited, impoverished and forever confined to the prison of the past.

The novel can be situated in the tradition of *Bildungsroman*, although the genre itself is revisited ironically: a touch of parody can be seen in many thematic and structural elements of the text, such as the protagonist's predictable childhood intimations, his adolescent sufferings, his turbulent (un)romantic relationships and the notable absence of one main love line, his inability to learn from the past and mature (an essential attribute of *Bildungsroman*), a lack of resolution and radical open-endedness. The novel tells the story of Lev/Lyova Odoevtsev, who was born into a family of old Russian intelligentsia (both his father and grandfather were academics). His grandfather was sent to the camps during the years of Stalin's repressions and after his return Lyova tries to get to know him (but mostly he tries to confirm the existence of the hero figure that he invented in his imagination). The dream that Lyova cherishes since childhood is to become a famous scholar and live in a bookish, quiet, dignified and respectable environment he became so familiar with since his early years. His life, however, brings numerous disillusionments and turns out to be trivial and meaningless. The climactic moment of the novel comes at the end, when Lyova and his life-long rival have a fight and a duel at the Pushkin House museum (where Lyova works) and destroy priceless exhibits, including Pushkin's death mask. Because the fight happens on the weekend, they manage to clean up the mess, replace broken glass cases and substitute the originals with forgeries before the museum's reopening on Monday. Nobody, however, notices anything and life goes on. The novel finishes rather awkwardly and abruptly, with several versions of endings (which further bring down the climactic pathos of the scene of destruction). The post-climactic nothingness parallels Lyova's emptiness as he realizes that his sacrilegious (albeit unwittingly sacrilegious) and "anti-heroic" act had no impact on the world and no consequences for him personally.

Pushkin House appears to be a true encyclopaedia and inventory of postmodernism, which was noted also by Western scholars: "... the author seems to have used the subversive literary devices of every postmodern writer he has read as well as some he has not. These include the essayism of Musil, the paratextual apparatus of Borges, Nabokov's exposure of fictional artifice, Eco's concern with intertextuality, and the repetition and narrative multiplicity of Robbe-Grillet" (Hellebust 1991, 267). In Bitov, however, one can clearly see not only the emerging paradigm of Russian postmodernism, but also its strong connection to the tradition of modernism. If a dialogue with socialist realism was present in *Pushkin House*, it was only implicitly and only because the model of artistic expression used by the author in itself constituted a negation of the official literary code. Modernism, however, both Russian and international, was one of the real points of departure for Bitov. The interruption of the modernist cultural paradigm by the socio-political developments in Russia did not erase the tradition from the cultural memory, but, possibly, enhanced its critical rereading from a temporal distance. Thus, postmodern self-referentiality, although essentially not original, becomes "a reconstruction of the avant-garde citational dialogue – but with a difference: now the dialogue is constructed with the avant-garde and modernist traditions themselves" (Oraić 106-07; translation in Lipovetsky 1999, 42). One of the potential influences in Bitov was undoubtedly the tradition of Russian metafiction, primarily Bulgakov (if to treat, in particular, his *Master and Margarita* as the high point of Russian modernism). The scholars who emphasize the importance of Russian modernist tradition in Bitov, refer to a variety of other sources, such as Akhmatova and Kataev (in particular, his *Grass of Oblivion*; see Oraić) and Vaginov and Mandelstam (Lipovetsky 1999, 42). The author himself acknowledged the influence on him of Proust and Nabokov (although he had not read Nabokov until the manuscript of *Pushkin House* was almost completed; see Skoropanova 1999, 129). This is another level – not thematic but rather subtextual – on which the continuity of the Russian literary tradition is explored.

Pushkin House as Academic Metafiction

In a way analogous to Wilhelm Mach's novel examined earlier in this chapter, *Pushkin House* is about literature, literariness and creative process, and it has a similar twist to it: the novel not only discusses the nuances of the act of writing as an act of creation, the condition of literariness, and the concepts of "author" and "character" – among many other technicalities of the trade – but it also radically deconstructs these categories along the way. Bitov's commentary, however, although universal in its wider theoretical significance, at the same time maintains a narrower focus in the context of specifically Russian literary production. The author himself elaborates that "*Pushkin House* is written as an anti-textbook of Russian literature" (Bitov 1991, 34, cited in Skoropanova 1999, 114; my translation). In its intertextuality the novel spans two centuries of the history of Russian literature and Bitov's thorough, unabashed "pilfering" of the national canon becomes obvious even from a cursory glance at the table of contents. The prologue, the titles of all three parts of the novel as well as the titles of most chapters are comprised of the titles either directly "borrowed" from Russian classics or parodically revised but still clearly recognizable. The main names targeted by Bitov are Pushkin, Lermontov and Turgenev, representing the core of the Golden Age of Russian literature. The title of the prologue, "What Is to Be Done?" is taken from the novel by Chernyshevsky, which was one of the key texts of the early socialist populist movement in the nineteenth-century Russia. Chernyshevsky's work posited a range of radical questions about Russia's socio-political present and future and discussed a possibility of a specific type of social experiment; his complex blend of fiction, non-fiction, philosophy and social thought belongs in the more general area of the discourse of utopian socialism. Within Bitov's novel, however, the title is distinctly parodic and resounds in many different contexts. If Chernyshevsky's novel pre-empted many social developments in Russia, Bitov's question "What is to be done?" is profoundly ironic to the reader – primarily because it was being asked after it *had already been done*; if Chernyshevsky searched for the answers to the capitalist reality of Russia, Bitov's question was directed at Russia's socialist present.[113] At the same time, in the narrower context it is also a question about the many aspects that constitute the vague, metaphysical, yet so essential to his countrymen concept of "Russian-ness": the issues of national consciousness, history, art, all of them brought together in the metaphysics of Russian cultural myth. The question parodies the urgency of the situation and the need to rescue Russia's intelligentsia from its obsession with the museum of the past. And in the most immediate context the question travesties the original source even further, as the author ponders trivial dilemmas of his creative process.

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[113] One of the more explicit political allusions in the prologue is Bitov's reference to the history of the former Russian capital city. As the author reflects on the bleak morning view of St. Petersburg and thinks of Peter the Great – significantly, on the day after the anniversary of the October Revolution – the reader is sure to remember the great ruler's plans for his urban creation as a "window into the West." The irony of this association in the context of Bitov's reality is obvious. The city is metaphorically conceptualized by the author as a long-lost dream, a nostalgia, a discursive construct: "письмо, адресованное когда-то Петром 'назло надменному соседу,' а теперь никому уже не адресованное и никого ни в чем не упрекающее, ничего не просящее..." (11; "a letter, which had once been addressed by Peter 'to spite his haughty neighbor', but now was addressed to no one, asked nothing...." 3). Here and later, all original quotations from Pushkinskii dom are from Bitov 1978; all translations are from Bitov 1987.

The context of the academic culture constitutes one of the more significant thematic planes of the novel. Not only the protagonist is born into a typical "professorial" family, but all of his dreams and aspirations are also built around becoming part of academe and achieving success in scholarship. The mythology of academe is represented on various levels: it is the younger Lyova's idealistic vision of himself as a scholar (in no particular field of studies), sacrificing his life on the mystical altar of Science and being honored for his important scholarly contributions (once again, in no specific area); it is Lyova's finally becoming a literary scholar; it is the author's critique and parody of scholarship and academe as an institution. *Pushkin House* is not just about literature and creative literary process; it is also about literary studies (the novel includes segments of articles or articles in their entirety on critical literary subjects). But above all, it is, to reiterate Ageev's apt designation, about Russia's being a "literaturocentric" society (25), a society that lives in a fictional and mythological continuum.

Bitov's author/narrator engages the reader in an intricate self-reflexive game, both pleasurable and obtrusively annoying. Self-reflexivity is incorporated in the very structure of the novel: the author's prologue and appendices to each part discuss the design of the text, the act of writing, and invite the reader to participate in the authorial decision-making process; these digressions, in themselves, have a rather complex structure and contain multiple subnarratives (fiction, segments of a diary, academic writing, the author's meeting with his hero, etc.). The novel also includes multiple endings/epilogues and a commentary to the (future) anniversary edition of the novel, which is written by the protagonist, L. N. Odoevtsev, (future) member of the Academy of Sciences (the commentary, although featured in the table of contents, does not appear at the end of the book). Except for these formally marked digressions, the author's figure shows up throughout the narrative. Sometimes these intrusions are marked by italics, but mostly they blend with the rest of the story. The very narrative voice and narrative perspective (first-person plural) is a constant reminder of the self-reflexive nature of the text and does not allow the reader to immerse in the fictional world. The narrating "we" is grammatically inclusive and makes the reader a default participant of the creative process; this device not only creates a critical distance and lays bare the very mechanism of fictionality, but also adds a dimension of light-hearted play to the story that otherwise may have passed as a good, old, traditional "serious" literature (and calling to mind Pushkin, Lermontov and Turgenev – Bitov's parodic objects).

Russian Cultural Space as a Simulacrum

The metafictionality of Bitov's *Pushkin House* differs from the self-sufficient play of form in that it becomes a means of construction of a complex commentary on the nature of the Soviet Russia's cultural and sociopolitical reality. At the very beginning of the novel, in his Prologue, the author clearly identifies the design of his project and his approach to it:

> *Мы склонны в этой повести, под сводами Пушкинского дома, следовать освященным, музейным традициям, не опасаясь перекличек и повторений, – наоборот всячески приветствуя их, как бы даже радуясь нашей внутренней несамостоятельности. Ибо и она, так сказать, "в ключе" и может быть*

> *истолкована в смысле тех явлений, что и послужили для нас здесь темой и материалом, – а именно: явлений окончательно не существующих в реальности. ...*
>
> *Итак, мы воссоздаем современное несуществование героя...* (14, emphasis in text)[114]

The theme of "non-existent" phenomena and unreality can be traced throughout the entire multilayered thematic and symbolic structure of the novel. Although the topos of the museum belongs to the traditional postmodernist inventory, it acquires a particular significance in Bitov. The author himself refers to the genre of his literary creation as a "novel-museum" (6); Pushkin House (an academic museum) both figures in the title of the book and becomes the central part of the novel's fictional space. The museum represents the ultimate simulacrum, a collection of (genuine? fake?) artifacts (and their catalogues) that lost their connection both with reality and with their original meaning; in an ironic twist, these are literary artifacts – the simulacra doubly removed from reality. The museum creates an illusion of materiality of culture and history, of their "presence" and continuity; they are, however, merely fossilized constructs, myths, that, in the context of the totalitarian structure, are contained in their hermeneutic finality and unitariness.

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[114] *"We are inclined in this tale, under the roof of Pushkin House, to follow in the hallowed traditions of the museum, not shying away from echoes and repetitions – on the contrary, welcoming them in every way, as if we even rejoiced in our lack of inner independence. For that, too, is "in key," so to speak, and can be understood in relation to the phenomena that have served us here as theme and material; namely, phenomena utterly nonexistent in reality....*

And so we are re-creating the hero's contemporary non-existence. (5, emphasis in text)

This symbolism of the museum can be extended both to Lyova's life and, in the broader context, to the socio-cultural space of socialist Russia. The protagonist's life has always been an exercise in unreality – from his childhood life in an isolated, bookish atmosphere of his family to his dreams of an abstract, divorced from reality scholarship, from his "unreal" relations with three women to his desire to live his life through the great classics. Although Lyova's attempt to breathe new life into the Pushkin scholarship is genuine, it is ultimately doomed to failure as he cannot step out of the context of the museum-like scholarship where everything is assigned its own place and value. The simulated nature of the Soviet reality is similarly all-encompassing; it constitutes the very mechanism by which the system procreates. As Lipovetsky rightly notes, "Bitov's most important achievement in *Pushkin House* is the exposure of the simulative character of the Soviet mentality and Soviet culture long before Baudrillard and his followers; that is, he draws the reader's attention to the primacy of imaginary constructs, of images without real referents, of copies without originals" (1999, 40). Bitov's excursion into his "novel-museum" displays nothing but grotesque death masks, and the complex self-referentiality of the novel only emphasizes the two orders of fictionality of the main hero's – and everybody else's – (non-)existence.

The final climactic scene in which Lyova and his rival accidentally destroy one of the most valuable rooms in the museum is significant in a twofold way: for the protagonist it is both an ultimate, horrifying sacrilege and a long-awaited, satisfying act of destruction. Lyova's symbolic plundering of the museum betrays his subconscious desire of violence against the impenetrable system. The irony of the finale, however, lies not only in the fact that the ruining of the museum goes unnoticed (and, therefore, Lyova's act remains ignored and unacknowledged), but also in the strong subversion of the context of "authenticity" of the museum's content. Thus, the destruction of Pushkin's death mask seems to be the biggest loss; however, the museum's keeper comes to the rescue and offers to bring a new one from the storage room ("У нас их много...," 382; "We have lots of them...," 326). The irony is further enhanced by different versions of the ending, in one of which Lyova dies, killed from the authentic (?) duel pistol of Pushkin. The surreal atmosphere of both scenarios – Lyova's "romantic" death in a duel and everyone's blissful unawareness of the real damage – prompts another level of questioning of the author's game: has the actual destruction of the museum ever happened? has it all been a dream after all?[115]

Bitov's deconstruction of the mythology of Russian culture runs deeper than the critique of the musem-like fossilization of the canon or the subversion of the simulated nature of the totalitarian reality. Although in *Pushkin House* Bitov's critical focus can be unambiguously located within the context of the Soviet society, it can also be situated within specifically Russian history and culture. His deconstructive project concerns itself primarily with the *founding myth of the imperial nation.* In the way similar to how many aspects of the earlier West European modernism mediated imperial angst in the face of the proximity of the collapse of empire, first-wave Russian postmodernism engaged in a sacrilegious destruction of the tradition to show cultural and political impotence of the nation. Although Erofeev's and Bitov's postmodernisms reflect two different perspectives

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[115] For a similar interpretation see Kuritsyn 2000, 159.

– one from below, from the very roots of discontent; the other from above – they are part of the same process that acknowledged fundamental inadequacy of both cultural and socio-political structures of the imperial reality.

CHAPTER III

Central and East European Postmodernism of the Post-Totalitarian Period: The 1990s and Beyond

III.1 General Overview

The chronology of Central and East European postmodernism offered in this study – as any critical literary periodization – inevitably presents an artificial construct that imposes boundaries and demarcation lines on the continuity of this literary phenomenon and literary practice of the period generally. The caesura that divides the discussed literary development into pre- and post-1990 stages is primarily of political nature because of the significance of the socio-political change that took place at the end of the eighties and defined the decade of the nineties.[116] Moreover, a lot of studies dealing with Central European postmodernism (not necessarily confined to the context of Polish literature examined here) seem to favour specifically 1989 as the turning point between the two stages (cf. the contributions of Žilka, Janaszek-Ivaničková, Cornis-Pope, Szegedy-Maszák, and Możejko [the latter refers to the late 1980s] in Bertens and Fokkema, Chapter 4.4 on Central and East European postmodernism, 413-60). It was in early 1989 that the Soviet Union completed withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, thus bringing to an end the last venture in the saga of its imperial expansion[117]; it was during 1989 that the Soviet-controlled governments of the satellite states were overthrown, which officially marked the end of the Soviet, or "East European," bloc.[118]

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[116] Some analyses proceed from more specific chronologies. Thus, for example, Skoropanova (1999) prefers to talk about three waves of Russian postmodernism; Janaszek-Ivaničková (1999) elaborates on five "tides" in Central European (Polish, Czech and Slovak) postmodernism.

At the same time, in its limitation such a chronology (with either 1989 or the early 1990s as the demarcation line) overlooks the fact that some of the important changes started to take place already in the second half of the 1980s during the period of "glasnost," which was officially introduced in 1985. The rise of the nationalist moods both in the Soviet peripheries and satellite states, open denunciation of the totalitarian system, further general liberalization of the literary process were just some of the developments that defined this half-decade. It was already the second half of the 1980s that witnessed a rise in the "productivity" of postmodernist writing and its manifestation of increasingly mainstream characteristics (as opposed to the more pronounced national idiosyncrasy of the first wave). However, it was only during the decade of the 1990s with its dismantling of the administrative and economic apparatus of the Soviet totalitarian system and, more importantly, restructuring of the literary institution that the process of institutionalization of postmodernism took place. This process comprised many elements. One of the most important aspects was popularization of both foreign works of postmodernist fiction in translation and works of national literature (at least in the cases where such texts where published in samizdat or abroad and, therefore, were either mostly unavailable or received very limited circulation). (Re-)reading of the first-wave postmodernism of the totalitarian period – which, although perceived "different," had been inevitably measured against the context of the realist tradition – was a significant step towards a reevaluation of the respective national canons. An important factor that contributed to the possibility of such a rereading was dissemination of the general theory of poststructuralism and postmodernism through the translation of the works of key Western thinkers as well as the publication of textbooks and reference books on international and national theory and practice of postmodernism (cf. Baran 1992; Kuritsyn 1992, 2000; Lipovetsky 1997; Hundorova 1996; Skoropanova 1999, 2002; Janaszek-Ivaničková 2002). These were complemented by numerous discussions in academic and literary journals – special issues (cf. Nycz 1993; *Diskussia: shto takoie postmodernizm* [Discussion: What Is Postmodernism] 1991; *Postmodernizm i kul'tura* [Postmodernism and Culture] 1993; *Postmodernizm: podobiia i soblazny real'nosti* [Postmodernism: Semblance and Allure of Reality] 1994, to name a few) as well as shorter critical studies (Hundorova 1993, 1995, 1996; Denysova 1995; Andrusiv 1997; Kuritsyn 1994a; Batkin, among others).

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[117] This statement is certainly not meant to ignore or underestimate many aspects of the post-Soviet Russia's neo-colonial and neo-imperial politics in relation to its own national minorities as well as some of the former Soviet republics, primarily Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Central Asian states.

[118] The actual dissolution of the USSR was formalized by the act of the Supreme Soviet on December 26, 1991.

If the postmodernist impetus of the earlier period was rooted primarily in the opposition to totalitarian structures and the deconstruction of the official discourse, the 1990s were characterized by a strong drive towards the Western cultural paradigm, of which – by then well-established – postmodernism was perceived to be an important part.

Although this drive had always been present even at the height of the totalitarian regime (particularly in Central Europe), after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, it acquired a particular ideological subtext as part of the general "project" of emancipation from the eastern neighbour (Russia) and from the four decades that radically devalued the socio-cultural image of the region. This rediscovery of postmodernism through the prism of Western philosophy and cultural theory and as a phenomenon inherently associated with Westernness was paradoxical in itself, as virtually all totalitarian societies of Central and Eastern Europe had manifested elements of postmodernist cultural production for at least two decades. Endorsement and officialdom of postmodernist practice in the post-totalitarian Central and Eastern Europe emphasized the mediating position of the region between the West and the East and the desire of these cultures to demarcate themselves from the past as well as from the lingering socio-cultural associations persisting into the present. The process was equally important for Russia, which, although occupying ambivalent Eurasian space, for centuries has been trying to claim its rightful belonging in the European cultural space. Thus, institutionalization of postmodernism took place in the ideological context of writing these national cultures in the larger European/Western paradigm. In a more general framework, however, the 1990s reflect the broader concerns and developments typical of the postcolonial literary space: preoccupation with the imperial "other" and the articulation of the national space, proliferation of historiographic metafiction, the rise of women's and, more specifically, feminist voices, and a more pronounced concern with the issues of minorities (ethnic, sexual, etc.). Because of the above common factors that underlie the development of the discussed national literatures in the post-totalitarian period, the overview in the present chapter treats the tri-cultural representation of this literary corpus in a more generalized and unified way.

The Politics of Postmodernist Play

One of the defining features of the second-wave literary postmodernism of the post-totalitarian period was a more prominent role of (free) play (*jeu libre*) that is sometimes critiqued as a self-sufficient aspect of postmodern textuality. In part, it is this emphasis on play that brought postmodernism into the focus of the on-going "traditionalist" debate on the social function of literature and the critique of "anything-goes" type of literature, with which "new" prose was associated. Here the comparison of the reception of the totalitarian and post-totalitarian postmodernisms calls for two observations: although literary postmodernism of the totalitarian period undoubtedly internalized play as a strategy (cf. for the earlier analysis of, for example, Mach, Hutsalo, Erofeev and Bitov), it was 1) neither referred to in the context of postmodernism, that is, it was not discussed as a convention associated with postmodern textuality; 2) nor associated with Western influences and literary models that at the time began to be viewed as normative/ mainstream in the West. As opposed to this earlier development, post-totalitarian postmodernism was very conscious of its free play impetus that threatened to destabilize the traditionally realist mainstream and the established status quo of the literary production; it also started to be conceptualized as a Western-influenced phenomenon. The latter point is particularly significant as it fared well with the pro-Western sentiments so popular in the post-totalitarian societies. The role of play thus acquires a new significance in the post-totalitarian cultures, which becomes – even if for a brief period of time – primarily ideological. Although it is hard to downplay the importance of play in postmodernist literature – both as a formal strategy and an ideological tool, it is precisely this aspect of the post-totalitarian literary process that received the least critical attention. Conceptualizing the ambiguity of play both as a formal experiment and a libertarian space contributes an important insight into understanding of the post-totalitarian literary process. It is primarily because of the engagement of play that postmodernism presented such an alluring, ultimate democratic space (cf. the writings of Tomasz Sęktas, Krzysztof Bielecki, Jerzy Grundkowski, Valerii Zalotukha among many others).

Beginning with Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle, the concept of play has long been a focus of theoretical elaborations. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such philosophers as Kant, Schiller and Nietzsche extended conceptualization of play to the areas of representation and art, making them applicable to the literary theory (see Slethaug145-46). However, it is only in the cultural discourse of postmodernity that play came to be regarded as one of the formal "dominants" of a specific mode of cultural production. In the process of their evolution both the social event and the theoretical notion of play undergo radical transformation. As Jameson observes, play no longer belongs exclusively in the private realm of childhood, having become organized and regulated by the consumer society (147), whereas in the area of critical theory the application of play was advanced from anthropology to various discursive systems. Although *jouissance* inherent in the postmodernist play implies primarily the pleasure of discursive activity both at the creative and the receptive end of the process, there are deeper, sociocultural connections behind the seeming self-sufficiency of the project. In the context of the present study it is necessary to differentiate between two uses of the notion of play: as an inherent attribute of postmodernist cultural discourse and as a mode of its existence (cf. Derrida, Lyotard); and as a normative set of specific tools, techniques, and strategies used in various media and discourses (literature, film, architecture, photography, etc) to achieve the effect of play and to engage the audience in the act of play – which in itself undermines the idea of spontaneity associated with the concept of play.[119]

Outside of the context of Western postmodernist theories, one of the important attempts to conceptualize play as a mode of cultural production belongs to Bakhtin, whose theoretical elaborations, preceding the emergence of poststructuralism, are being increasingly more often viewed in the context of their affinities with the radical Western philosophy of the 1960-70s and adopted for the purposes of the latter. Although Bakhtin cannot be referred to as a "post-logocentric" thinker, he, arguably, through his notions of "carnivalesque" and "dialogic," envisaged the postructuralist notion of play, imparting it a strong socio-political ground.[120] Exploring play through the medieval and Renaissance carnivals (primarily in *Rabelais and His World*), Bakhtin politicizes play as an inherent part of both carnival (a historical form of public entertainment) and a carnivalized literary discourse. Bakhtinian play as a transgression, disruption, and exposer of the social hierarchies, appears a destabilizing factor and a potential agent of social change. Bakhtinian dialogue with its ever-going search for a meaning/truth, its rejection of any finalization, its conception of knowledge as a space of inherent "unfinalizability,"and, more importantly, as a complex interrelation and interaction of utterances and discourses has many affinities with Wittgenstein's and Lyotard's concept of "language games" discussed below. Carnivalization of literary discourse is transgressive in respect to both the establishment of sociocode and the normative values of the literary code.

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[119] Here it is important to differentiate between the notions of "play" and "game." Game is primarily a structured activity, necessarily including rules and goals (and, by implication, rule maker(s)), whereas play is arbitrary, random, spontaneous and non-structured. Thus, game can become representative of the society-imposed normative modes of thought and behaviour, while play is associated with disruption, transgression, and violation of game rules. As seen below, Lyotard's insistence on the usage of the "game" is grounded in the broader sociocultural context, dealing with the organized and institutionalized production (both intellectual and material). Derrida, on the other hand, prefers the concept of "play," thus emphasizing fluidity and spontaneity of the peripheral free movement within the structure (also cf. "ludism"). For a broader overview of the theories of play and game see Huizinga; the 1985 special issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* entitled *Game and the Theories of Game* (ed. R. Rawdon Wilson); the 1996 special issue of the same journal *Play, Game, Literature* (ed. Steven Scott); Burke; Scott 1996, 29-62; Edwards. For a detailed discussion of different types of game and play see Wilson 1990, 3-24.

The philosophical and ideological background, against which the theory of postmodernist play evolved, can be linked to the declining belief of logocentrism and the general crisis of representation. Logocentrism implies a belief in an extra-systemic validation of "presence" or "center" which stabilizes the meaning of the linguistic sign, yet, in itself, escapes any questioning (Derrida 109-10). This essentially "realistic" – in the broadest sense – epistemology (Jameson, in Lyotard viii) conceives of representation (artistic, scientific, etc.) as a truthful reproduction of the outside objectivity that is beyond scrutiny. The shattering of these philosophical foundations called for a different validation and a new coherence of discursive systems and discursivity generally, which was attempted in the theories of the postmodernist play. With Derrida's blessing, play has become legitimized in the realm of language and signification and, of course, Derrida's own writing (just as the philosophical discourse of poststructuralism generally) became the foremost eclectic, transgressive playground of ideas, allusions, differences and forever sliding signifiers.

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[120] For example, for a discussion of relation of Bakhtin's concept of carnival to the context of poststructuralism, see Wilson 1990, 36-41,69-72; in particular, the author argues that "[o]nce one has defined carnival as transgression, or more complexly as revolution or as war, a law that replaces another law against which it has transgressed, it is logical to assimilate the concept to any extreme version of ludism, including deconstruction" (ibid., 41). For a discussion of carnival in postmodernist literature, see McHale 1987, 171-75. Also, see Krysinski's more general discussion of Bakhtin's theory in relation to the issues of ideology (1984).

It is for this reason that among the contemporary theories of play, poststructuralism (and primarily Derridean deconstruction) became particularly pervasive. One of the most common misreadings of poststructuralism, however, is ascribing to it apolitical indifference and a self-contained preoccupation with the issues of textuality. Derrida's works can be misinterpreted particularly in the context of his own style of writing and the superficial self-sufficiency of his linguistic and textual enterprise in the context of deconstructionist theory ("serious" philosophy cannot be playful). However, the concept of (free) play, and particularly of its displacements, models social destabilization of the structure of power, allowing for the new elements to shift from the margins to the centers of power, stimulating a continuous, fluid process of movement and change. Thus, in his essay "Structure, Sign and Play," among other works, the concepts of decentering, displacement and dislocation already betray the ideological mechanism in place and the fact that play is not neutral. Centre, totalization, finitude – these notions appear to be in constant opposition to and incompatibility with free play:

> ... nontotalization ...can be determined in another way: no longer from the standpoint of a concept of finitude as relegation to the empirical, but from the standpoint of the concept of play. If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field – that is, language and a finite language – excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. (118-19)

Drawing his example from the history of the human sciences, Derrida points out that evolution of such a discipline as, for instance, ethnology meant primarily a major dislocation of European culture, which is not "first and foremost a moment of philosophical or scientific discourse. It is ... a moment which is political, economic, technical, and so forth" (112). Elaborating on the correlation of center and play within structure Derrida nonetheless cannot escape the presence of the center (cf. 109). In fact, the granted existence of center becomes the precondition of play, the free movement of elements within structure. However, Derridean center is always peripheral, outside the structure and the totality, always subject to change and movement. The center is no longer unique, but "a center" determined by the flow of the play. This constant shifting of "centers" as points of reference potentially creates an infinite number of centers, of truths. In the context of later Lyotard's works this means a shift towards micronarratives, each one rightful on its own, seeking no absolutizing stability or legitimation.

In his treatise on the "postmodern condition," where he outlines new directions in sociology, philosophy of science, and philosophy of language, Lyotard explicitly situates (the postmodern) play against the sociohistorical background of postmodernity, which he defines as the condition of "incredulity towards metanarratives." Notably, Lyotard avoids speaking of "play," choosing to remain in the operative framework of the "game," as an event determined by the specific rules and conditions of a particular game (game-maker?), as well as those of the broader sociocultural context. Placing different fields of human activites (economy, science, culture/art) in the discursive context, Lyotard situates the new status of knowledge (implications of which are "no less sociopolitical than epistemological," 18) in the context of language games that underlie social discourses. Language games can be defined in terms of several principles[121]:

> ... their rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are the object of a contract, explicit or not, between players (which is not to say that the players invent the rules). ... there are no rules, there is no game, even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game. ... every utterance should be thought of as a "move" in a game. (10)

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[121] Here Lyotard is drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein (sec. 23).

Although he does not discard the aesthetic aspect of the play ("A move can be made for the sheer pleasure of its invention," ib.), this pleasure depends on "a feeling of success won at the expense of an adversary" (ib.), in the case of literary discourse the adversary being "the accepted language, the connotation" (the concept of "the accepted language" expanding easily by analogy to any other discursive system). Here the self-sufficient pleasure of the game becomes almost a contradiction in terms, as any successful "move," erasing its predecessor, participates voluntarily or non-voluntarily in the progression of ideas with all potential consequences in the sociopolitical context. According to Lyotard, language games compose "the observable social bond" (11) in a way that they negotiate reality and meaning or representational plane. Any narrative is self-legitimating because of its deep interrelation with our culture's social construction of reality.

The collapse of an old epistemology creates a gap (a lack of a "center") that needs to be filled. Thus, the "new" scientific discourse is called not to seek out the ambiguous ultimate truth, but rather to participate in generation and exploration of new ideas (games). In a narrower context, this also holds true for the post-totalitarian societies with their loss of traditional values, systems of beliefs, and forms of identification. In this context discursive play/games can certainly assume the form of a new socio-political expression, a new "liberated" space. Lyotard's discursive games (true games, which make unexpected "moves," i.e. new statements) create radical disbalance of power, that's why the degree of "displacement" (free play) in the game becomes important (16). The fluidity of the "centres" achieved in this way underlines the unattainable truth/knowledge, emphasizing the process rather than result. As opposed to metanarratives, micronarratives, or "little narratives," do not require legitimization by power (institutionalized hierarchy); they "define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do" (23).

From the broader context of games within social structures and social discourses, let us turn now to the smaller scale games at work in postmodernist literary discourse and their participation in a broader ideological context. Linda Hutcheon's series of books on postmodernism or related topics (1980, 1985, 1988, 1989) as well as Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) and *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992) are some of the more influential theories of literary postmodernism. Both Hutcheon's and McHale's are noteworthy attempts at creating a comprehensive inventory of narrative techniques and tropes employed by postmodernist writers – as surveyed from the vantage point of the institutionalized postmodernism of the 1980s - early 1990s. From the broad range of ontological displacements to (anti-) representational play, from the play of narrative levels to tropological games, from the play of intertextuality to the play of historical styles and plays of irony and parody, postmodernism in literature boasts an impressive arsenal of strategies that can be found subversive both artistically and socially (or, at least, can be argued to have been subversive in the early years of postmodernism). To what extent these games and plays, that are both spontaneous and strategically and technically constructed, belong with the ideology of Derridean "decentering" and "non-totalization," and Lyotardian dethroning of grand narratives? Seemingly, subversion of different orders of power is inherent in the very pluralistic nature of the literary postmodernist project and the flexibility of postmodernist technical inventory as an open system. However, to what degree is it valid to speak of a genuine political engagement in postmodernist play and how thin is the demarcation line between its apparent subversive impetus and the normative formal requirements that constitute the code of writing claiming to be (or categorized as) postmodernist? This question can be addressed from two perspectives.

Firstly, the conceptualization of postmodernist play as an ideologically active, "charged" component of postmodernist cultural/literary discourse can be approached in the context of both writer's intentionality and audience's "reading" or interpretation of a given text/corpus of texts. In the introduction to his *Anti-Aesthetic,* Hal Foster draws a line between a "postmodernism of resistance" and a "normative" postmodernism. The former is concerned with "a critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop- or pseudo-historical forms, with a critique of origins, not a return to them. ... it seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations" (Foster xii). Arguably, all early postmodernism (approximately 1960s) was, by default, a discourse of resistance, a "critical deconstruction" of the tradition of modernism and modernity. During this period poststructuralist theory either had not been formulated or become mainstream yet, and postmodernism as a cultural code had not been institutionalized; postmodernist texts were both written and read as innovative and – potentially – transgressive narratives. From a historical perspective, Foster's differentiation probably becomes more valid during the later stage of development of postmodernism, when various marginal discourses (e.g., postcolonial, feminist, minority writing) appropriate postmodernist technical experimentations for their own purposes and become true voices of resistance. Respectively, postmodernist play in the literatures of Central and Eastern Europe during the totalitarian period is representative of the radical opposition to the inscribed discursive codes (both artistic and socio-political); during the post-totalitarian years, it becomes – at least in part – an acknowledgment of the normative code. Although any institutionalized discursive practice tends to be more formalized and less representative of its earlier breakthrough significance, "normative" postmodernist play of the post-totalitarian literature – particularly in the 1990s – was still ideologically informed in the context of its dialogue with the immediate historical and political past of the societies under discussion.

Secondly, a more general aspect of (postmodernist) play must be taken into consideration. How truly transgressive – that is endangering to structure – is play? Edward W. Said's famous words "Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances?" (cited in Foster 135) can be paraphrased as "Who plays? For whom is the play being initiated/staged? In what circumstances?" The very concept of transgression cannot be discussed outside the historical context. If in earlier historical eras transgression might have been seen as a reprehensible violation of social/cultural decorum, today it appears to be a desirable feature of cultural production. In contemporary literary discourse, as Wilson notes, "transgression might be said to signify what is most valuable (that is, most literary) in literature" (30).[122] Thus, transgression may be equated with innovation and experimentation, but also with potential challenging and questioning of established structures and codes.

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[122] Also see his detailed discussion of different forms of literary transgression (Wilson 1990, 29-34).

Bakhtinian concepts of carnival and carnivalesque are most often associated with transgressive social and literary practices. The aspect of Bakhtin's theory of play and its later applications that attracts serious critique, however, is the libertarian, humanist impetus inherent in his thought and a revolutionary, liberating drive often attributed to it. Umberto Eco commented that "Bakhtin was right in seeing the manifestation of a profound drive towards liberation and subversion in Medieval carnival. The hyper-Bakhtinian ideology of carnival as actual liberation may, however, be wrong" (1984, 3). Any "asystemic" elements only reinforce the meaning and coherence of the system. By analogy, for the carnival, as a play of parody and subversion, to be enjoyable and effective, there should be certain rules in place to be well established and widely recognized. As Eco expresses it, "... they [comedy and carnival] represent paramount examples of law reinforcement. They remind us of the existence of the rule" (1984, 6). And if the modern universal carnivalistic play seems to be all-encompassing, it, in fact, is restricted to and, respectively, structured within certain cultural topoi such as television, urban festivals, etc. (as opposed to the historical carnival, strictly defined in time and place). Hutcheon, focusing mainly on the modern carnivalesque in contemporary culture as well as in literary discourse, similarly reinterprets Bakhtin's concept of the popular play as a utopian space:

> ... these transgressions of literary and social norms remain legalized by the authority of the genre's elastic conventions, just as pop art is made popular, not by

> the youth who buy it as much as by the authorities that manipulate their consumption – the New York publishers and marketing experts who both precensor and peddle, the multinational record companies, and even the commercial radio stations. (1983, 87)

Although Eco's and Hutcheon's parallel evaluations of the pseudo-subversive force of carnival and the carnivalesque capture the paradox of the essential "carnival" situation, their comments, at the same time, point to some obvious broader implications: any act of transgression makes sense only if it takes place within a dominant structure against which it reacts, that is, if it constitutes a counterstatement of sorts; as such, it remains strictly regulated in the framework of institutionalized societal mechanisms. By extension, for example, postmodernism may be treated as an "essentially rule-breaking art, and thus ultimately dependent on the persistence of the rules that it sets out to break, as a figure depends upon the ground against which it defines itself" (McHale cited in d'Haen and Bertens 19).

Although postmodernist play may be argues to be politically and socially determined, can it also be ideologically engaging? This remains a matter of debate. There is no doubt, however, that postmodernist idea of free play had symbolic meanings for Central and East European cultures. Play can be conceptualized primarily as an individual or collective space of freedom (albeit freedom may be argued to be ambivalent here), and this is sometimes emphasized as one of its more important attributes: "First and foremost ... all play is a voluntary activity. ... By this quality of freedom alone, play marks itself off from the course of the natural process" (Huizinga 7). Although here Huizinga focuses on the "cultural" (versus "natural") attribute of play, the inherent element of free act and freedom associated with it remains significant. It becomes particularly important within the context of discourses, such as postcolonial writing and feminism, that emerged on the margins of mainstream. On a similar note, in the influential *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*, Slethaug concludes that "[t]he freeplay of fiction and social values is ... usually antihegemonic and pluralistic, at the same time using and refuting traditional societal values" (149). In the context of the post-totalitarian societies, the micronarratives of postmodernism have played an important role in the shaping of a new sociocultural code. The radical displacements of postmodernist play and dislocations of the old values mold new forms of social thought and behaviour through their contribution to the postmodern anti-fundamentalism.

Writing Postcolonial/Post-Imperial Space

While the debate on whether the concept of postcoloniality is applicable to the regions of the former Soviet influence may go on, it is undisputable that literary postmodernism manifests a very complex relationship with the legacy of the totalitarian period. The symbiosis of the postmodernist forms and techniques and postcolonial preoccupations includes issues of reevaluating of national space, of imperial otherness and national history. The problem of national space figures prominently in a lot of writing of the period. As opposed to the "traditionalist"[123] pro-romantic treatment of the narrative of nation, postmodernist writers often resort to the context of cosmopolitanism or the deconstructive subversion of the national mythology. Such is, for example, the rediscovery of Polishness through the prism of the global perspective in the writings of Manuela Gretkowska (in virtually all of her works), or rereading of the mythological foundation of the primordial Russianness by Tatiana Tolstaya (in most of her short prose and, in particular, her recent novel *Kys'* [*Slynx*], 2001).

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[123] The concept appears to be quite legitimate in the critical discourse of the debate on postmodernism in the post-totalitarian societies of the former Soviet bloc. It denotes

The invisible presence of the ghost of the imperial Other marks most of the writing of the post-totalitarian period – whether on the explicitly thematic or symbolic level. Reevaluation of the past and the effects of social otherness on the identity alienation and personality crises constitutes some of the important aspects in the negotiation of many tensions of the condition of postcoloniality. One of the representative texts in this respect is Tomek Tryzna's *Panna Nikt* (*Miss Nobody*; to be examined in more detail later in this chapter). The discussed corpus of literature also commonly manifests oscillation between two centres of otherness: the imperial centre of the past and the (usually desirable) centre of the West (cf. the writings of Andrukhovych, Dibrova, Zabuzhko, Zalotukha, Petrushevskaia, Tolstaia, Sharov, Tryzna, among many others). Negotiating the legacy of the imperial Other necessarily involves the space of history.

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adherence to the realist tradition and commitment to common centuries-long literary/cultural values versus free play, experimentation and non-orthodox ways of artistic expression. The concept of nation is inevitably involved in this debate as it is one of the old, sanctified values traditionally supported and reinforced by the discourse of literature. Although not all postmodernist writings necessarily deconstruct the space of nation in a radical way, they, at the same time, often question and devalue it through the unexpected reversal of context, different perspective and the very subversive discursive qualities of the text.

Playing with and rewriting the official version of historical events foregrounds the issue of textuality of history, which thus enters the playground of the postmodernist narrative. Interestingly, postmodernist historiographic fiction figures most prominently in Russian literature: Valery Zalotukha's *Velikii pohod za osvobozhdenie Indii* (*The Great March for the Liberation of India*, 1995), Vladimir Sharov's *Repetitsii* (*The Rehearsals*, 1992), *Do i vo vremia* (*Before and During*, 1993), Mikhail Berg's *Ros i ia* (*Ros and I,*[124] 1990), Evgenii Popov's *Nakanune nakanune* (*On the Eve of the Eve*, 1993), short prose of Vyacheslav Pietsukh, Liudmila Petrushevskaya's short play *Muzhskaia zona* (*The Male Zone*, 1994), to name just a few examples. Although Russian historiographic metafiction appears to be concerned primarily with the revisionist rereading of history – which is often light-hearted and unpretentious, it also displays anxieties typical of the post-imperial complex and betrays some deeper concerns about the present and future of the nation caught in the aftermath of the seminal developments of the twentieth century.

Women's Writing

The discourse of feminism in Central and Eastern Europe has a long history, and the evolution of feminism in the Soviet Union is a separate subject in itself. The post-totalitarian period, however, constitutes a qualitatively new stage and becomes both a belated extension of the third-wave feminism in North America and Europe and an independent phenomenon. Social and political emancipation that came with the collapse of the totalitarian structures influenced all areas of social and intellectual thought. The 1990s were marked by the emergence of new institutions and organizations, serial publications, conferences dedicated to the issues of the "new," post-totalitarian feminism. Thus, in Poland several centers for women's studies and the advancement of women's cause are prominent, for example, Centrum Praw Kobiet (The Center for Women's Rights) in Warsaw; one of the more important feminist groups housed in Kraków, Women's Foundation "eFKa," publishes the journal *Pełnym głosem* (*In a Loud Voice*). A number of book-length publications of the last decade discuss both the theoretical and methodological aspects of feminism within the area of social sciences and the humanities (see Ciechomska, *Od matriarchatu do feminizmu* [*From Matriarchy to Feminism*] 1996; Janion, *Kobiety i duch inności* [*Women and the Spirit of Otherness*] 1996; Ślęczka, *Feminizm. Ideologie i koncepcje społeczne współczesnego feminizmu* [*Feminism: Ideology and Social Conceptions of Contemporary Feminism*] 1999). In Ukraine the Kharkiv Center for Gender Studies, along with the similar centers in Kyiv and Odesa, is particularly active. The Kharkiv Center supports serial and other publications (the journal *Genderni studii/Gender Studies*; special issues in other periodicals, such as *Contemporary Philosophy*; publication of the substantive *Theory and History of Feminism*, 1996). In Russia of primary importance is the Moscow Center for Gender Studies with its series of publications and similar centers/programs for women's studies in the major universities of the country. Also, as in the case with the general theory of postmodernism, translation of the foundational works of Western feminist thinkers and theorists was of crucial importance.

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[124] The original title plays with the name of Russia – *Rossiia* – which is broken down into a phrase of three meaningful words.

Notwithstanding these factors, the feminist movement still remains largely marginal to the cultures in question. As Anna Sobieska comments, "few Polish women identify with it [feminism]"; she further elaborates that

> [a]mong the many reasons for this the most important seems to be the strong Catholic tradition and our history: the specific nature of the Polish nobility and the long absence of independence. This mixture created a myth of "Mother Pole" which ascribed to Polish woman one principal role: of giving birth and bringing up a good Catholic and Polish patriot struggling for a free country. She was to be a spiritual and patriotic inspiration for everyone around. The image of "Mother Pole" is deep-rooted in Polish culture. Famous during the Solidarity period song "In order that Poland may be Poland," known by everybody and sung then also in the churches, portrays fighting men and their sisters, wives and mothers busy with embroidering the words "God, Honour and Fatherland" on Polish flags. (2000, n.p.)

Although Sobieska talks in particular about Polish society, her commentary certainly applies to other Central and East European states (cf. the analysis of a similar situation in the Czech Republic in Petros 2000; also, see Tempska). In a way very similar to the reception of post-modernism, the reception of feminist ideas here stumbled into deeper rooted and highly resistant cultural models and values.

In the light of the above, the emergence of strong women's voices in literature has particular significance both for the social advancement of the feminist ideas and as part of the process of de-marginalization of minority discourses in the context of the post-totalitarian cultures. The 1990s produced a brilliant pleiad of women writers, many of them speaking from the postmodernist perspective: Natasza Goerke, Isabela Filipiak, Olga Tokarczuk, Manuela Gretkowska, Magdalena Tulli, Krystyna Kofta, Ewa Kuryluk, Oksana Zabuzhko, Solomiia Pavlychko, Tatiana Tolstaya, Liudmila Petrushevskaya, Valeria Narbikova, and Iulia Kisina among others. Coming into prominence of the feminist concerns and merging of the feminist agenda with the postmodern aesthetic and postmodern discursive strategies mark yet another phenomenon analogous to the developments that can be grouped under the umbrella of the process of emancipation in the postcolonial societies of a few decades earlier, where the centripetal thrust of the marginal discourses shared the deconstructive political platform of the postmodern project.

III.2 New Polish Prose: Ontological Explorations

The debate sparked in the Polish literary criticism of the last decade regarding the status of postmodernism in this literary community[125] (including some explicitly negative reaction of ideological resistance) ironically proves at least one thing as being *de facto*: this nation's cultural consciousness entered a new epistemology, and it had happened long before the institutionalized criticism felt it necessary to officially acknowledge the issue.[126] Behind the questions hotly debated by both proponents and opponents of Polish postmodernism (the degree of its involvement in the discourses of political and national significance, the issue of subjectivity, the abandonment of meaning or, alternately, search for it, the degree of assimilation of Western poststructuralist/ postmodernist philosophy and theory in literary praxis), there is an apparent clash primarily between the drive towards joining the Western cultural paradigm and the established tradition of the cultural code. Approaching the issue necessarily involves differentiating between the period of totalitarianism, during which postmodernist tendencies emerged in part as an opposition to the officially inscribed code of writing and the later years of the "liberated" art/literature. It must be acknowledged that the demarcation line between the two is rather ambiguous, especially in Poland, where the transition happened much earlier than in the Soviet Union and some Central European states. Nevertheless, even outside this socio-political context it is possible to differentiate between 1) the writings of the early and later 1960s, when the emergence of postmodernist art was not influenced by the normative code of postmodernism (poststructuralist and postmodernist theory had not yet been articulated at the time) and 2) the writings of later, mature postmodernism, very well represented by the fiction of the 1990s. The latter absorbed and productively integrated previous literary experience; these literary works also acknowledged and creatively responded to the institutionalized philosophy of poststructuralism and theory of postmodernism, at times becoming explicitly preoccupied with the technicalities of this "ism."

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[125] See the discussion of various aspects of the issue in Nycz, Możejko 1996, Uniłowski, to name a few.

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[126] As Janaszek-Ivaničková notes, literary studies in postmodernism were lagging behind philosophical and general cultural research (1995b, 80). The first discussion of Polish literary postmodernism endorsed by the Instytut Badań Literackich (Institute of Literary Studies) in Warsaw took place in a special issue of *Teksty Drugie* in 1993 (see Nycz), which was marked by a generally conservative attitude.

The prose writings discussed here cannot be set any further apart from the perspective of style, conception, and technique, yet, curiously, they all form part of the bigger picture inasmuch as they explore different sides of the discourse of postmodernism. Mastery of the set of literary tools and techniques "prescribed" by normative postmodernism and elaborate flaunting of it in the Polish fiction of the last decade did not turn these literary works into a self-sufficient game and did not overshadow the need to express a concern for the human condition in today's world. This is where the two stages of the development of Polish postmodernism meet, and where the still surviving existentialist state of "being" crosses its ways with postmodernist "being."[127] The persistence of existential tendencies is certainly not unique to the Polish fiction,[128] and can be generally ascribed to Central and East European literatures, where preoccupation with the depth and meaning of the literary code was never lost. Viewed within the European tradition, existentialism is often granted considerable importance in the shaping of later postmodernist philosophy (for instance, cf. Fokkema 1995, 20; Hoffmann 1986). The evolvement of a different state of "being," however, of a *mode* of being rather than a firmly grounded positivistic being, exploration of alternative ontologies, of a continuous "becoming" is what marks the postmodernist perspective. It is primarily through the category of being that other categories and dimensions are elucidated. Foregrounding the ontological dimension, according to Brian McHale, forms the dominant of postmodernist fiction, and the writings discussed below serve as good examples of this proposition.[129] The factor of interplay of the two categories of being – existential and postmodernist – holds particularly true for *Panna Nikt* (*Miss Nobody*, 1993), a literary debut of a Polish cinematographer.

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[127] On some aspects of correlation of postmodernism and existentialism see Hoffmann 1986; Bertens 37-52.

[128] Cf. the treatment of "existential postmodernism" in Slovene literature (Virk 24 *et passim*).

Tomek Tryzna

Tomek Tryzna's novel *Panna Nikt* was characterized by Chesław Miłosz as "[p]ierwsza prawdziwie postmodernistyczna polska powieść" (9) and by another critic as "jedna z najważniejszych polskich powieści wydanych w latach 90" (cited in Miłosz 1).[130] Originally written in 1988, it still bears a vague yet unmistakable presence of the imperial "other," as well as the ever-present European/Western cultural nostalgia, so acutely sensed yet in Tadeusz Konwicki's *Kompleks polski* (*The Polish Komplex*). This inevitable invasion of social issues into the narrative justifies the observation that the novel "jest postmodernizmem alla polacca, czyli wbrew pozorom dużo w niej historyczno-społecznej troski" (Miłosz 9).[131] Although by no means dominant or defining the novel's orientation, the implicit socio-political issues and the occasional encroachment of the social (or external) reality into the narrative signal the socio-political backdrop for the very private and fragile world constructed in this story. Even though the novel has what can be called a residual plot, it primarily foregrounds both the power and legitimacy of the internal and possible (fictional?) worlds. An adolescent girl Marysia from a religious, traditional working-class family, becomes a toy in a powerplay of her two new classmates, belonging to the elitarian structure of the social hierarchy, and manipulating her spiritual world. The first-person narration, representing the innermost thoughts and experiences of the protagonist, occasionally breaking down to a stream-of-consciousness technique, frames an extremely powerful and integral existential world, fascinating in its simultaneous naivité and maturity. Significant is the choice of the narrator's age: adolescence constitutes here a marginal (psychological, physiological, etc.) condition *par excellence*.[132]

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[129] See my earlier discussion of McHalean ontology (Chapter 2, section on Shevchuk).

[130] "the first truly postmodernist Polish novel"; "one of the most important Polish novels published in the 1990s" (my translation).

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[131] "is a Polish version of postmodernism despite the obvious presence in it of socio-historical anxieties" (my transaltion). This quote is characteristic of the conception of postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, Tryzna's writing is categorized as postmodernist *despite* its social concerns.

[132] Resorting to a younger protagonist is not uncommon in Polish literature (for instance, cf. T. Konwicki's *Zwierzoczłekoupiór*). However, this shift in the main character's age group is not related to broadening of the novel's readership, as the book is not meant for a younger audience. The focus on an adolescent protagonist is significant primarily as a radical change of perspective and as an examination of a liminal state of psyche. As Czesław Miłosz commented on the book, "...ten podtytuł ["Tajemnicza powieść o dojrzewaniu"] powinien być uzupełniony ostrzeżeniem: tylko dla dorosłych, a nawet: tylko dla czytelników po czterdziestce, czyli wieku, w którym niegdyś wolno było pobożnym Żydom czytać księgi Kabały" (1). ("... the subtitle [A

Discursive and Ontological Displacements

In his novel Tryzna does not employ the usual range of postmodernist techniques (cf. for most of the earlier discussed texts), emphasizing instead the realm of language and discursivity. Panna Nikt's /Marysia's continuously displaced being seeks both validation and self-deconstruction within the framework of her own narrative. The narrator's world is a world of indeterminacies; it is a self-contained discourse, not legitimated through any external points of reference (such as a third-person omniscient narrative, different narrative perspectives etc.) – the reader has no way of knowing the *degree* of construction of reality that is taking place in the narrative (by reality I mean not only the girl's subjective experiencing the world, but also some events independent of her perception that are supposedly happening in her life). Intradiscursive indeterminacies (i.e. subordinate to the consciousness of the narrator) split the world of the main character into the *worlds*, and although we cannot talk here of an absence of one central consciousness or, rather absence of subordination of these worlds to one consciousness (so important, for instance, in McHale's definition of postmodernism[133]), a working notion of

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Mysterious Novel About Growing Up] should be a definite warning: this novel is only for adults, moreover, only for adults in their forties, that is for the readers who are of the age when, long time ago, pious Jews were allowed to read the books of Cabala" (my translation).

[133] McHale emphasized independent alternative ontologies (i.e. ones *un*subordinated to the narrator's/protagonist's central consciousness) as one of the pre-conditions of the postmodernist ontological world construction. Although it conveniently serves McHale's purposes of a rather rigid classification of modernist vs. postmodernist texts, it falls short of covering a potentially wide variety of texts by disregarding other aspects of postmodern textuality.

metaontology can be used to examine the construction and exploration of other selves and realities in *Panna Nikt*. Although subordinate to the narrator's consciousness, these selves/realities undoubtedly acquire an ontological status; they are about other modes of being, which do not necessarily happen to be a willful result of the narrator's consciousness. The girl's retreat into her fantasy universe(s) creates a continuous tension between a series of metaontological layers.

Ontological suspension is created in the opening pages of the novel, in a scene where the girl reaches her physiological maturity and where her "out-of-body" experience occurs: a temporary loss of identity (she hears crying in the woods but cannot recognize it as her own) accompanied by becoming part of a fairy-tale-like episode with a princess and a knight. Even within this fantasy world the character is not able to identify herself with the princess, and, in fact, losing her identity goes even further – it is the knight who is "wounded" and dying in a pool of blood. The fantasy scene is framed by the experience of hearing "somebody's" crying voice through what is a typical actualization of the Freudian mechanism of displacement and suppression and alienation of one's sexual ego. The fairy-tale setting and the topos of the woods is highly indicative for the implications of psychoanalysis: her journey, just like that of Litttle Red Riding Hood, Snow White, or Sleeping Beauty is a symbolic journey towards coming to terms with her sexual self:

> ... słyszę krzyk. ... To krzyczy ktoś w głębi lasu. Jakby dziewczyna, bo cienki krzyk... (9)
>
> Już nie jęczy kawaler, nie żyje. Spod niego, wolniutko, wypływa czerwona strużka. Płynie ścieżką, do moich bosych stóp dopływa. Stoię w kałuży krwi i nie

> mogę się ruszyć.... Jakaś śmieszna dziewchynka stoi w lesie i krzyczy rozpaczliwie. To ja jestem tą dziewczynką... (11)[134]

Integration of the fantasy episode in the narrator's reality appears to be close to the technique of magic realism. In this context it serves the purpose of suggesting "the individual's experience of anxiety, estrangement and isolation" or – at the other end of the scale of emotions – evoking experiences which have "a liberating effect" (Palmer 182). However, the repetitive structure of crying as an "other's" voice and its dissociation from the narrator's identity impedes smooth melting of the fantasy into her immediate reality, rather juxtaposing the world of "here" to "there," as in the episode of listening to music:

> Zgubiona, w ciszy strasznej i pustej. Coś tam gra jeszcze. Patrzę... chmury grają, gwiasdy graią ... ale mnie iuż tam nie ma, tu jestem.
>
> Ktoś płacze, jakaś dziewchynka płacze, coraz głośniej płacze. I słyszę głos jakiś bardzo blisko, głos jakiz... (60)[135]

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[134] "... I hear a crying sound. ... Somebody is crying deep in the woods. It sounds like a girl, because the voice is high...";
"The knight is not moaning any more, he is dead. A red stream is flowing from underneath him. It is running down the path, right to my bare feet. I am standing in a pool of blood and can't move... Some funny girl is standing in the middle of the woods and crying desperately. I am that girl." Here and further all translation of Tryzna is mine.

[135] "I am lost in an empty and terrible silence. Something is still playing there. I am looking ... a play of clouds and stars ... but I am not there any more, I am here.
Somebody is crying, some girl is crying, more and more loudly. And I hear somebody's voice very close, some kind of a voice...."

In a self-conscious way, the character's awareness of her ontological "lapses" causes her to question analogical situations: "Słyszę płacz, ktoś się w klasie rozpłakał. To nie ja..."(29).[136] Although ordinarily the designation of "somebody" inherently implies "not me," the narrator has to mentally reassure herself: "It's not me."

Multiple Selves and Lacanian "Mirror Stage"

The mirroring effect, so important in Borges and Nabokov, plays a particularly significant role as a metaphorical means of conveying the idea of the multiplicity of selves and plurality of realities; the mirror continuum is a window into another reality or another mode of "being." At the same time, however, mirror is a slightly treacherous medium that inevitably distorts reality. In *Panna Nikt* thematized scenes with mirrors appear in the houses of Marysia's classmates, and the mirror medium exhorts a tremendous power on her. As opposed to small-scale mirrors, symbolizing episodic, "fragmented" vision (or even a lack of one) in the main character's life, later in the narrative the emphasis is being placed on full-sized mirrors, as a privileged luxury, but also as a metaphor for the opening of a new perspective or world view in the character's life. In the latter case mirrors designate a new degree of the narrator's discovery of herself, as well as her estrangement from her old identity. The mirror uncovers, in a unexpected and startling way, the "unknown" self; it projects new potential of one's own unrealized possibilities. The process of reappropriating one's identity through a qualitatively new perception, in its suddenly alienated form, has a profound effect on the integrity of the protagonist's individuality. This typically Lacanian splitting of the "I" involves first and foremost a radical transformation of the subject, when the self-sufficient "I" sees him/herself for the first time as a social "I," that is as seen and perceived by others; this entails the act of "sharing" of one's identity, estrangement through losing the privilege of owning one's own body/image, and alienation through the intrusion of the other "I." Such a metamorphosis of the subject takes the character through a drastic reshaping of her world:

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[136] "I can hear a cry, someone in the classroom burst into crying. It's not me."

> [t]he mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (Lacan, 992).

As the fascinated girl observes the multiplication of her image in a set of mirrors (50), she unwittingly enters the process that will take her on the road to the destruction of her identity as a unitary self. Marysia continuously sees her distorted, alienated, out-of-body self everywhere (cf. how she observes her reflection at night in the window glass – her "night mirror" – without "seeing" herself, 282). The following scene, which takes place later in the novel, is significant in that it symbolizes the decisive metamorphosis, the fluidity of her self, and the on-going "becoming" of the character:

> Podnoszę się z krzesła, odwracam do lustra.
>
> *Jakaś dziewczyna* tam stoi.

> To ja? ... (336)
>
> Moje czoło... takie *dziwne*, takie wysokie. A oczy jeszcze dziwniejsze i takie *obce*...
>
> Rozchylam usta, tamta dziewczyna też rozchyla usta, bo przecież to ja.
>
> *Ja*. (337, my emphasis)[137]

The final assertion, testifying to the merging of "I" and the "other," and the recognition of one's identity as combining the two, marks the turning point in the evolution of the protagonist's personality. Being here and elsewhere – as well as being aware of the internal and external dimensions of the self – constitutes a continuous tension and an on-going negotiation of the spatial identity throughout the girl's narrative ("Wewnątrz jestem, czy zewnątrz...?" 345; "Am I inside, or outside?"). The emergence of the new identity constitutes a crisis point at which existential being and postmodernist being come together, and where the issues of personal freedom and moral responsibility cross with those of discursive/ ontological independence and the totalizing power of the narrator. In *Panna Nikt* the world of the main character is a narrative, her verbalized consciousness. The flow of words is clearly infatuating to the narrator, who is indefatigably weaving the world of her thoughts. Characteristically, there is a constant "glance" from askance, a look at her narrative as a "product" (as, for instance, she often checks herself when coming too close to verbalizing thoughts too intimate to be heard by the listener/reader –

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[137] "I am getting up from the armchair and turning to the mirror. *Some girl* is standing there. Is that me? ... My forehead, so *strange*, so high. And the eyes are even stranger and so *alien*. I open my mouth, the girl opens her mouth, too, because it's me. *Me*" (my emphasis).

or her other self?). The narrative is the object of her creation as well as a mode of her existence. The heroine's growing conviction that she construes her own world and is able to close or re-open it at her will is both a means of escaping from the immediate reality and a tool of exercizing her absolute power. She is the creator of her world, which, incidentally, involves not only herself but also the people surrounding her. Here the issue of postmodern subjectivity reaches its ultimate manifestation, where it involves not just the issues of self-reflexivity and awareness of the process of narration. Here the narrator/protagonist *is* her own narrative, and her magic tales are both a product of her mind and her reality inasmuch as they replace her immediate environment and impact her actions, – which ultimately results in a termination of her story-telling, that is, her suicide. The protagonist's ultimate control over her discursive world is also her power over her reality and the people in this reality – the only control and power she can exercize in her life. Thus, cutting off her narrative (and, together with it, the reality/presence of her domineering friends and other people in her life) takes het to the blank space of silence and non-existence and tests the thin boundaries of power, life and death: "Kiedy człowiek rodzi się, razem z nim rodzi się świat. Świat istnieje dla niego. Tylko dla niego" (425).[138] In the end Marysia collapses the world that fails to serve her – although the conclusion may appear ambivalent and rather open-ended.

Panna Nikt, the title of the novel, ambiguously reconciles its two implications: "Miss Nobody" indicates the protagonist's status on the hierarchical ladder of social power, ascribed to her by her two classmates; it is also, however, a reference to the protagonist's tortuous search for meaning, identity, and a coherent self, and her inability to fill the emptiness and nothingness of her world.

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[138] "When a man is born, the (a) world is born together with him. The world exists only for him. Only for him."

Although the analysis of the novel can be approached from different perspectives,[139] the discussed aspects of this narrative are significant in where they extend into the similar issues in Tomasz Sęktas's prose.

Tomasz Sęktas

The problems of the subject's preoccupation with his/her ontological status, exploration of alternative modes of being, and the process of (re)articulation of one's identity are again encountered in Sęktas's *Narracje* (*Narrations*, 1992), where they are examined in a metafictional and self-reflexive framework. Notwithstanding the fact that there are some affinities between Tryzna's and Sęktas's novels, the latter is much more intellectual. If Tryzna presents a very simple, childish, at times naive first-person act of story-telling, Sęktas's novel anticipates an informed reader: his narrative engages in a dialogue with philosophy and critical theory and provides an informed commentary on the technicalities of the media involved in the novel (creative writing, cinema, theater). Here, however, self-reflexivity is not just a plot- or structure-forming device; it is a thematized technique, and the complex metastructure is built around the issues of the "creator"(subject) and the "product" (world), as well as the problem of interrelation between them (i.e., their status in respect to each other). Explicit flaunting of the metafictional mechanisms verges on a parodic reworking[140] of and commentary on one of the more popular postmodernist narrative strategies. Semantization of the narrative structure is manifested not only as a comment on the metafictional labyrinth of a literary structure, but also as a philosophical comment on the hierarchy of ontologies, including the ontology of possible worlds, and as a statement on the narrative as an ontological mode.

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[139] The novel also yields itself easily to a largely socio-historical exploration of the roots of Marysia's failure (cf. Milosz' review, almost exclusively based on the novel's extensions into the social reality of Polish post-totalitarianism: in particular, the growth of a society of simulacra and mass consumption). Such historisizing approach, however, disregards the particular perspective (that is, the space of language, story-telling and discursivity) through which the social conditioning of Marysia is put into focus.

Semantics of the Narrative Structure and Self-Reflexivity.

Discourse as Existence

The structure of the novel (although the genre specification can be debated) is singular enough to be discussed in a more detailed way. Divided into three parts, it deals with the same character's world as presented through different narratival perspectives. The opening part of the novel is structured through two narratives that develop in a parallel fashion: one is the first-person exposition of the main character's experiences, the other presents the same experiences as captured in the format of the cinematic medium. The "film" is presented as being viewed by an observer who, in a detached, "objective"

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[140] To reiterate my earlier discussion, in my usage of the term "parody" I follow Linda Hutcheon's definition of the concept as an inherently intertextual phenomenon of critical rereading (see Chapter 1).

manner, renders the happenings on screen (for the reader of the novel) with the consideration of all the technicalities of cinematic expression, such as changes in light, in the movement and angle of the camera, and details of editing. The viewer-commentator is undoubtedly educated and proficient in the language of cinema, as he is not only describing the on-screen events but also interpreting the role of the camera as a "creator" of a fictional world. The viewer does not appear to be the maker of the film, as he is hesitant at times and comments on a range of *potential* interpretations of the cinematic narrative. The "film narrative" is segmented into numbered sections marking its minimal logical units. It also recreates *verbatim* whole parts from the parallel first-person narrative, making repetition an important device and highlighting the relativistic, perspectival design of the novel. This structure foregrounds the issues of sameness and difference, identity and non-identity: although the repeated segments are exactly the same, they are, at the same time, different because no repetition or representation can capture the essence of the object in its totality, and every representation (signification) is fundamentally flawed.

The second part presents "The Theatre of One Spectator" (which, incidentally, also happens to be a theatre of one actor; it is not clear whether the spectator and the actor the same person). The main character's freeing himself from the symbolic and actual closure of the theatre of fiction revisits the motif of the ontological independence of a fictional character. But if the character breaks the boundaries of his inscribed reality, so does the narrator/commentator make a move towards the violation of the traditional demarcation line separating them. Sęktas, however, does not collide the real, "objective" world (or whatever may serve in this capacity) and the fictional creation. The real world as such is clearly absent, with a world of the narrative and narration taking its place (cf. Baudrillard's fourth order of simulacrum). Here, the collision of different *ontological realities* is a collision of different *narratives*.

In the last part the character exists through his surviving letters as partially recreated by his epistolary friend. The main character's self-annihilation through the destruction of his own writings is a response to his ever growing angst in the labyrinths of discourse. In a manner similar to Tryzna's protagonist, silence becomes the only means of ending his existence. The central character, a blind man, characteristically marginalized — by the very fact of his physical handicap — focuses on his internal condition, as well as his sharpened compensatory sensory perception of the external reality in its most trivial manifestations. His narrations (cf. chapters "Spacer" ["A Walk"], "Kąpiel" ["A Bath"]) emphasize a process and explore a condition rather than action. Virtually plotless, the novel defies any more precise placement along the spatial (geographical) or temporal (historical) dimensions converging at the zero point of the narratival time and space. The fragmentary structure of the novel and the constant shift of perspectives, however, take the main focus off the personal exploration of the protagonist's experiences and shift it from the subject/object of this particular narrative to the internarrative space. From the main character's traveling along the complicated paths of his own narration to the juxtaposition of different narratives, the novel exploits the intertextual allusions of Borgesian and Barthian labyrinths. Explicit references to labyrinths of fiction, unmistakably connected to the above names, relate both to the literal aspect of the character's wanderings (like, e.g., in a labyrinth of urban dwellings) and to the existential problem of his quest for the meaning. As in Barth's "Lost in the Funhouse," it is both the protagonist and the reader who search for their way in the meaning-making process. Descending down the hierarchy of narrative levels, which constitute a distinct *mise-en-abyme* effect, is part of the challenging exercise in the first part of the novel. The direction of the *mise-en-abyme* movement is opposite in the parallel narratives: in the main character's (or just the Character's, the way he is referred to initially) story, it is developing inwards (towards the narrative of his dream), while in the film narrative it is unfolding outwards, i.e. towards the narrator (reader). Although both narrative dimensions create a potential for an infinite regress, it is the cinematic narrative that is undoubtedly much more complicated, both technically and conceptually. Thus, the film itself (as a cinematic representation of the Character's experiences/reflections, etc.) constitutes the innermost level of this narrative. The process of making the film forges the next creative/interpretive structure. The voice of the commentator in the film layers on the previous two levels, while the narrator of the film chapters interprets the role and the comments of the latter. The narrator's level, however, does not presuppose the ultimate word, the central consciousness, the kind of a god-like stature that allows for a traditional "author/narrator" symbiosis. It explicitly envisions the reader, it construes a narrative/interpretive space for him, and it gives way to the next interpretive structure, which subordinates him. The following comment is characteristic in this respect:

> ... Scenariusz (?), szkic scenariusza (?) pozostawia w tym miejscu realizatorom (?), czytelnikom (?) jak największą swobodę, możliwość improwizacji,

> ironicznego potraktowania fragmentów prozy ... Poniższe epizody są tu tylko propozycjami – możliwymi do częściowego odrzucenia, zastąpienia, bądź też uzupełnienia przez realizatorów (?) filmu, czytelników (?) ... (Sęktas 87)[141]

This implicit assertion of unfinalizability of narrative/interpretive levels, the interpretive Chinese box structure (we are reading, but we are being read too, and so on) constitutes a philosophical comment on the relativity of any word, its interconnectedness with the larger discursive net, and its being part of the universal discourse. Integration of the strong critical voice of the narrator, cold and detached, professionally precise in its technical terminology, enhances the self-reflexivity of the novel. His commenting on his own role as a narrator, on the behind-the-screen voice in the film, designating the protagonist simply as "the Character" ("bohater") or "*our* Character" (thus, once again, leaving room for the reader's participation), situates the whole event of the novel's narrative in the context of the process of its production, the mechanism of its functioning, the complexities and ambiguities of the meaning-making process. From this point of view, the title *Narracje* (*Narrations*) is a comment on the novel as a kind of a fictionalized study in narratological problems. On the other hand, however, the title also alludes to the "narrativized" life of the protagonist, which becomes the mode and precondition of his existence. The theme of a life in the narrative and through the narrative relates distinctly to the post-structuralist premise of autonomy of discourse ("fact immanencji, samoistności i samowystarczalności ... opowiadania," 103).[142] Thus, although the narrator acknowledges his complete power over his fictional creation (as in the above-mentioned episode where he sets his character free from the ontological reality of his discursive world, leading him out of the "Theater of One Spectator"), he, at the same time, refuses to finalize his interpretation; instead, he presupposes potential interpretive versions throughout the text (e.g., "[b]ohater w swoim śnie (?), wizji (?), konfabulacji (?) zahowuje się jak osoba widząca," 47; "... [bohater] jest kimś dominującem i nad realizatorami obrazu (?), i nad widzami (?), czytelnikamu scenariusza (?)," 44).[143] The narrative acquires an autonomous status, becomes independent of its creator, whose "vision" of the text is as good as that of the reader. Similarly, in the last part, after the protagonist's death his friend realizes,

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[141] "At this point [of the narrative], I am leaving the screenplay (?), the draft of the screenplay (?) to the producers (?), readers (?); I am giving them an ultimate freedom, a possibility of improvisation, of ironic rereading of the prose fragments. ... The further episodes are only suggestions, where separate parts can be discarded, replaced, or added at the discretion of the producers of the film (?), readers (?)...." Here and further all translation of Sęktas's *Narracje* is mine.

> ... oto pewnego dnia ... uświadomiłem sobie, że tak skrupulatnie przeze mnie gromadzone listy od niego żyją własnym życiem, i że już sam fact uznania ich suwerennej egzystencji w sposób dziwny, paradoksalny jakby, zaprzecza mojej własnej suwerenności.... (147-48)[144]

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[142] "the fact of immanence, self-essentiality, and self-sufficiency of ... the narrative."

[143] "[i]n his dream (?), vision (?), fabulation (?), the character behaves as though he can see"; [the character] is somebody dominating over the producers of the film (?), over the viewers (?), the readers of the screenplay (?)."

[144] "... one day ... I realized that his letters, so carefully piled in front of me, have a life of their own, and that the very fact of my acknowledgment of their autonomous existence, in some odd, even paradoxical, way, denies my own sovereignty...."

The Character's wandering in the "labyrinth of fiction" is not brought to an end by his "liberation" in the second part. As the narrator comments, such a gate to freedom opens only into the next reality of fiction, and so with no end. Thus, no matter how real is the protagonist's next escape, it is not any more real than his previous world. Although this commentary is articulated in the context of fictional discourse, it also has direct implications for the issues of correlation of reality and fiction, the nature of reality, and the indeterminacy of both fictional and real worlds:

> ... Ironia, z którą go [bohatera] do tej pory traktowaliśmy i traktować będziemy nadal, nie przysłania nam jednak jego ważności, nie zaciera tego konflictu pomiędzy jego obecnością a naszą... (114)[145]

The impossibility of finding freedom and truth within the discursive labyrinth also has more somber social implications. The character's desperate quest is highly reminiscent of Kafka's fiction, which constitutes one of the more important intertextual links in the novel. Particularly significant are Sęktas's allusions to *The Castle* and *The Trial*. In fact, J. K. from *The Trial* is integrated into the novel as a character – albeit an invisible character. His presence in the narrator's world is betrayed by a sudden appearance at his place of two men (from the department of special services) who look for a certain Jósef K. (31-40). After the encounter, the feeling of being hunted (or watched?) weighs heavily on the narrator's mind, and the realization of the impossibility of escape becomes one of the central tensions of the novel.

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[145] "The ironic attitude, with which we have been treating him [the character] so far, and will treat in the future, does not overshadow his significance, does not eliminate the conflict between his and our presence."

The lengthy chapters of the character's first-person reflections on his experiences and his search for the meaning of human existence help achieve a combination of two perspectives: one exploring the technical mechanism of textual production, the other reflecting on the philosophical aspects of the discourse in relation to its subject and reality. Sęktas's novel can be best described as both a reflection of and a meditation on post-structuralist philosophy and its integration in the contemporary literary praxis. Sęktas's prose openly acknowledges the theoretical elaborations and literary experiences of the previous years, which the author reworks and on which he builds. *Narracje* is a very technically written novel not only because it employs elements of critical discourse and explores mechanisms of metafictionality, but also because it consciously exploits and foregrounds the set of techniques that already became normative in postmodernist discourse. Resorting to a *mise-en-abyme* effect that comes close to the Chinese box structure, playing heavily with *verbatim* repetitions[146] throughout the text, quoting lengthy excerpts from a number of original texts (Borges, Gombrowicz, Mrożek), utilizing the expressive possibilities of graphic emphasis in text, and engaging in language games are just some of the techniques the author uses in the novel. Sęktas's frank acknowledgment of his literary predecessors (primarily Kafka, Borges, and Barth) comes through the consistent resorting to such recognizable topoi associated with their work as "labyrinth," "glossolalia," "exhaustion," and the symbolical use of the mirror. Explicit flaunting of these techniques and topoi is as much an intertextual reworking of the previous literary experience as it is a manifestation of an explicit self-awareness/self-reflexiveness of a second-wave postmodernist text.

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[146] In the first part of the novel, where the first-person narrative runs parallel to the film script / film narrative, the latter repeats all the lengthy (interior) monologues of the protagonist.

Manuela Gretkowska

Manuela Gretkowska's prose represents a different face of the second-wave Polish postmodernism. Much lighter and trivial (although triviality may be superficial), with elements of autobiography and documentary text, Gretkowska's books represent the mosaic of contemporary culture and society. Streets, people, a circle of friends brought together by circumstances, casual conversations – these are fragments of different people's lives, interspersed with reflexions on art, religion, historiography, and the like. The author's cosmopolitan experiences in Western Europe paradoxically (or inevitably) resound with Polish subtexts. Her three earlier books (*Tarot paryski* [*The Parisian Tarot*], 1993; *Kabaret metafizyczny* [*Metaphysical Cabaret*],1995; *Podręcznik do ludzi* [*A Textbook on People*], 1996) both explore the human condition in today's world and probe some spiritual issues without pretense for elitarian intellectualism. Although Gretkowska's prose is not concerned with the technicalities of the creative writing process in a self-reflexive way characteristic of Sęktash, it unmistakably shows off the technical gains of postmodernism in an unabashed way. Thus, the entire narrative of *Kabaret metafizyczny* is structured as a series of footnotes, where each brief section of writing serves as a footnote to the previous one, that is, it forms a subordinate level, expanding into a Chinese box structure. The tongue-in-cheek catch, however, is that the chain-like development of the succession of footnotes lacks the traditional (and commonly expected) dependence of a regular footnote on the main narrative; here the relation between the footnote and the footnoted text is built mostly on the associative link to an arbitrary word in the text (the word also happens to be in the opening sentence of the footnote). The very idea of footnotes, of course, is implicit of the "main" narrative in the background; the absence of such forms an explicit gap, inviting the reader to fill it at his/her own discretion, and, at the same time, emphasizing arbitrariness of such finalization. The "footnote" narrative style (although without usual footnote graphic markers) is charateristic of the other Gretkowska novels. Fragmentation and arbitrary connection of narrative episodes, insertion of pieces of random information with a minimal grounding in the background narrative, mixture of different styles (primarily, fiction and non-fiction), journalistic commentaries on the issues of wide topical range -- these are some of the defining features of Gretkowska's style. If in *Tarot paryski* the main plot line is inserted at the interrupted word in a naughty telephone conversation of two lovers and forms but a glimpse into the lives of the immigrant and cosmopolitan circles of the French capital, *Podręcznik do ludzi* develops a more elaborate narrative frame featuring autobiographical details, the coherence of which, however, is continuously disrupted by intervening micro-narratives. Thus, for example, the book includes a lecture on certain functions of the nervous system (read by the narrator at her audition for a radio station), a study of the assasination of Marat, one of the leaders of the French Revolution, and the reflection of this event in art (as a manuscript written by the narrator's friend), a "lecture" on the origins and meaning of cabala (to which the narrator was inspired by an accidental observation of Rembrandt's *Doctor Faustus*), the narrator's version of a possible continuation of Jan Potocki's *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie*, her creative extensions of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (in particular, the monster's presumed rather humorous impressions of the nineteenth-century Poland), etc. This, together with an extensive resort to the visual and other media (the author's cartoons, reproductions of some original works of art, reproductions of Tarot cards, a sample of sheet music, and the like) forms rather an eclectic mixture of discourses and styles, a mosaic of worlds, outweighing in its significance the actual plot line framing the text (which, in itself, is rather residual).

Between Fiction and Reality

Play with fictionality forms an essential element of *Podręcznik do ludzi* and is significant in the way it constitutes a comment on the issues of discursivity in general, on the construction of fictional space, and the problems of authorship and readership, among others. Situating herself as the protagonist of the *Rękopis nieodnaleziony* (*The Undiscovered Manuscript*, a creative extension of Jan Potocki's classic work[147]), the narrator violates the sacred boundaries of the fictional universe, where she simultaneously trespasses on the territory created by the original Author, and, as a character belonging to the reality of her own text, enters a different ontology. The element of play and the light-hearted spirit of the project are foregrounded throughout the book. Thus, for example, when the protagonist gets an official invitation from a periodical to write a "continuation" of the canonical text, it is explained in the following way: "Nie, żeby profanować dzieło Mistrza, ale może by tak dla zabawy " (113).[148] Significantly, the whole manuscript subnarrative is italicized, like all the original quotations in the book, which explicitly separates this story into a fictional world in its own status and detaches it from the reality of the main narrative. The narrator's look at herself from the "outside," observation of oneself as a participant of a different ontological order – doubling of an "I" – is characteristic of the postmodernist exploration of the displaced identity. Interestingly, the *mise-en-abyme* tale told within the "Potocki" subnarrative is being delivered by another character, while the narrator remains merely a listener, somebody, who happened to be a "recipient" of the story – a well-known technique of authentication of the realistic discourse, which is parodied here, as it ironically clashes with the explicit fictionality of the tale. On the other hand, it also becomes a tool of authentication of the created fictional world where the narrator just "happens" to be. Gretkowska's playing with the

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[147] Count Jan Potocki (1761-1815) was a famous Polish historian and archeologist, who was educated in Switzerland and France. Potocki traveled and researched extensively in Northern Africa, Middle East and Asia. His *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie* (*The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, 1804-05) was written and published originally in French under the title of *Le manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse.* Written in the tradition of *The Arabian Nights*, Chaucer, and Boccaccio, it is a metafictional and self-reflexive

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narrative that is as much about an eclectic collection of adventure and mystery stories as it is about the act and tradition of storytelling itself.

[148] "Not to profane the Master's writing, but maybe just for fun."

Frankenstein characters and taking them out of the "reality" of their fictional world belongs to the same order of ontological displacement.

The narrator's explicitly verbalized need to return to "reality" after her excursions into multiple subnarratives and the general repetitive use of the world "reality" becomes rather equivocal for all its seeming clarity, and is indeed far from unambiguous. The reality seems to be in the facts of her childhood, in her every-day life, in her closeness to earth during her work at an archeological site, but it is also in her escape to the world of language, in her listening to a tale in the "Potocki narrative," and in her being a part of her own story. The reality of Gretkowska's narrator is fluid and indeterminate, just as the world of the author herself is fluid and indeterminate. This writer's prose (specifically, *Tarot paryski* and *Podręcznik do ludzi*) constitutes an elaborate comment on the postmodern condition of spirit (by the extension of the Lyotardian designation). Fragmentation and *bricolage* of human relationships, simultaneous informational fatigue and thirst, bringing together and mixing seemingly incompatible orders of both life and discourse appear to be some of the more prominent themes of Gretkowska's writing. She particularly enjoys playing with low and high styles, overlapping the discourse of the street and that of a scholarly article, of the casual "over the coffee" conversation in a bar and of abstract reflections on erudite issues. The point, however, is not the very fact of the coexistence of these, but the degree of their approximation: the demarcation line between the two realms is hopelessly blurred. The intellectual discussions in Gretkowska's books are positively toned down and accessible, without the pretense for an exclusive elitarian recipient, while the casual, trivial conversations are just as important and meaningful, constituting another truth of life.

Discourse, Art, and Death

Regardless of the different approaches to express the same postmodern preoccupation with the issues of being, the prose of the discussed three Polish authors converges at the point of one motif, namely, the motif of death: death as silence, symbolic death, death as a ritual, death as a word. Paradoxically, the postmodern exploration of life through its limits and through death is not a contradiction in terms. As Brian McHale aptly puts it:

> ... insofar as postmodernist fiction foregrounds ontological themes and ontological structure, we might say that it is always about death. Death is the one ontological boundary that we are all certain to experience, the only one we shall all inevitably have to cross. In a sense, every ontological boundary is an analogue or metaphor of death; so foregrounding ontological boundaries is a means of foregrounding death, of making death, the unthinkable, available to the imagination, if only in a displaced way. (1987, 231)

Exploration of death unfolds both in a "displaced" way and, more explicitly, on the thematic plane. In McHalean sense, preoccupation with and anxiety about death is implicit in the very fact of the discursive mode of existence of the characters under discussion. The first-person narration in *Panna Nikt* and *Narracje*, and the protagonists' clearly discernible infatuation with their world of words, with the verbalization of their existence, is that ontological boundary that marks the demarcation line if not between life and death, then between existence and non-existence. Living in discourse and through discourse implies the end of the process of narration as a certain ontological gap (as in *Panna Nikt* where Marysia at her will "closes" the world in the middle of her story) or death. The death of the protagonists in both *Panna Nikt* and *Narracje* is marked with half-finished sentences of their cut-off narratives. As previously in Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*, where silence is the character's only escape from the labyrinth of his existence, Marysia's end is equivalent to absolute silence and nothingness, while the narrative of Sęktas's character stops at the tip of a burnt page of the manuscript. Both characters' narratives can be described, in McHalean terms, as "posthumous discourses," voices from beyond the grave, words surviving their creators – particularly so in the case of Sęktas' character, whose letters continue to trouble and affect the life of his epistolary friend long after his death.

The explicit motif of death on the plane of content is clearly present in Gretkowska's prose. Exploring death as a kind of a universal and transhistorical common denominator in human existence, she, however, does not romanticize it; on the contrary, death is trivialized. Yet trivialization of mortality in general, of death, and, more importantly, of the face of death, has nothing light about it. Depleting death of its previously cultivated spirit of mystery and awe leaves it with nothing but ugly physicality and bodily disintegration. Such is the death of Michał in *Tarot paryski* and the narrator's husband in *Podręcznik do ludzi*. Ultimately, this is also the death of Marat, so scrupulously dissected in the latter novel. The whole scenario of Marat's assassination, however, acquires a deeper connotation in the context of Gretkowska's examination of

Charlotte Corday's motifs and impulses. Corday's accomplishment of the murder with the knowledge (and anticipation) of the following death sentence is explicated as an utter act of theatricality, as a self-sufficient dramatic script, followed through and implemented in life. The careful and calculated "staging" of both Marat's death and her own (she was guillotined) was nothing more than a re-enactement of the particular "literary" models of murder and death (specifically, Gretkowska refers to Corneille and Racine, 75-76).

> Zabicie Marata 13 lipca 1793 roku byłoby gestem symbolicznym, a zarazem realnym, tak jak realne i jednocześnie symboliczne są gesty aktorów na scenie. (Gretkowska 1996, 75)[149]

The secondary appropriation of this act in art takes place in David's *The Death of Marat* and, much later, in Edvard Munch's painting under the same title (*Death of Marat I* and *II*). Munch, as opposed to David, who was a witness to the turbulent political developments of the period of the French Revolution, is removed from the immediate historical reality of these events and mediated by David's art: his representation of Marat's assassination draws primarily on David's painting. However, apart from being a re-interpretation of an earlier artistic work, it is also an anguished and ominous outcry of a psychologically disturbed soul, an anticipation of his own death. Munch supplied his version of Marat's death with a figure of the murderess bearing the likeness of his mistress. Re-interpreting through the famous murder scheme his own troubled relationship with a woman, Munch unwittingly projected the artistic construct into his own reality (although in real life Munch was not killed; his lover committed suicide in his presence). This never ending chain of "micronarratives" transferred from art into life and vice versa reflects the mutual engagement of art/literature and life as equal in status discursive systems, or, from a different perspective, emphasizes the discourse of art as another reality. The ever-going "rehearsal" of death (the notion actually mentioned by Sęktas' narrator in his dream narrative) through its eternal re-enactement across the worlds of both reality and fiction is another ontological dialogics encountered in all three authors.

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[149] "The murder of Marat on July 13, 1793 was a symbolic gesture, but also a real one, just like the gestures of actors on stage are both symbolic and real at the same time."

Although the works discussed here represent different aspects of postmodernism, they also manifest a common interest in the exploration of the nature of reality and being. Ontological displacements analyzed here, like any postmodernist displacements, refuse to accept the authority of the unitary truth and search for absolute meaning. When an artistic form stops being oppositional either to the political regime or artistic canon, it gradually acquires more self-sufficiency – not necessarily in a negative way. Certain relaxation and enjoyment of the form is undoubtedly obvious in the Polish fiction discussed here. Yet the longing for the slipping away "signified" is also there. This balancing of technicality and meaning, of game and essence uncovers yet another face of today's Polish postmodernist writing.

III.3 Ukrainian Literature and the (Post-)Carnival

Iurii Andrukhovych

The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s form a particularly significant period in the cultural life of Ukraine. If the other states of Central and Eastern Europe celebrated their freedom after approximately four decades of being part of the Soviet empire, for Ukraine the anticipation of the coming independence was even more meaningful, as the country went through over four centuries of colonization and was under the successive rule of the Russian, Austrian, and Austrian-Hungarian empires, Poland, and the Soviet Union. Thus, the postmodern developments in the Ukrainian culture of this period inevitably clashed with the socio-political and cultural trends characteristic of a newly postcolonial state: the heightened sentiments of nationalism, the rediscovery of history, and the intensified search for the new forms of self-identification. Although Iurii Andrukhovch is known primarily as a very popular and commercially successful prose writer who published a number of novels during the 1990s and later (cf. *Recreatsii* [*Recreations*], 1992; *Moskoviada*, 1993; *Perverzii* [*Perversions*], 1996; *Dvanadtsiat' Obruchiv* [*The Twelve Rings*], 2003), it is his poetry that will be examined in the context of the present study. If Andrukhovych's novels have been analyzed by scholars and critics both in Ukraine and in the West (cf. Vladiv-Glover; Kharchuk 1995; Sherekh; Chernetsky; Pavlyshyn 2001), his poetic explorations have not received significant critical attention in the context of the study of Ukrainian postmodernism (for some brief comments, particularly in the context of postcolonialism, see Pavlyshyn 1992a, 1992b).

As one of the leading theorists of postmodernism in Ukraine notes, the phenomenon associated with Andrukhovych, his poetic circle (the "Bu-Ba-Bu" group), and the creative model he inspired was an important development in Ukrainian literature: "найвиразніша форма літературного постмодернізму, як вона склалась в українській літературі" (Hundorova 2000, 283).[150] It is noteworthy that Hundorova still found it possible to argue this in 2000, when Ukrainian literary scene became significantly more diverse. The importance of the tradition represented by Andrukhovych and his circle constitutes not only a literary, but also a cultural phenomenon in the broadest context, and reflects the artistic and intellectual atmosphere of the time, as well as a particular ideology ("ідеологія ... пов'язана з ідеєю Карнавалу," Hundorova ibid.).[151]

Iurii Andrykhovych (together with Oleksandr Irvanets and Viktor Neborak) belongs to the trio of poets and prose writers under the name of "Bu-Ba-Bu," who appeared in the late 1980s in the atmosphere of the newly awakened national self-awareness and great cultural upheaval on the eve of the collapse of the totalitarian structures and the coming independence of the nation (the era of the "quiet revolution," as defined by one of the poets, Neborak 73). Written in the spirit of the predominantly carnivalesque mode, complete with its subversion of hierarchies, norms and canons, Andrukhovych's poetry and prose stirred a lot of controversy at the time when the national consciousness was dominated by nostalgia for authentic myths and cultural essentialism. The poet engages in a largely controversial discourse of re-evaluation and re-contextualization (both explicit and implicit) of traditional values and discourses.

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[150] "the best example of literary postmodernism as manifested in Ukrainian literature." Here and further all translation from Ukrainian is mine.

[151] "an ideology ... connected to the concept of the carnival."

Transhistorical Fair and Imperial Archeology

Andrukhovych's poetry, belonging to the "carnival" period of the Bu-Ba-Bu group (in particular, from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s), reflects both the authenticity of the jubilation spirit of national liberation and a critical detachment of a spectator of the "show."[152] Andrukhovych's carnival "laughter," which is both light-heartedly playful and soberly ironic, creates a framework for a wide range of play and transgression that involves literary hierarchies and national mythologies, intertextuality and parody. On the more specific level, there is a distinct dialogue with Bakhtinian *carnivalesque* (which is also manifested especially clearly in Andrukhovych's novel *Recreations*). In the poetic cycles such as "Цирк 'Вагабундо'" ("Circus 'Vagabundo'") and "Середньовічний звіринець" ("Medieval Zoo"), Andrukhovych creates a trans-historical fair, where history collapses to a zero point of time and space. This fictional space of make-belief reinforces everything that is not sanctioned in the context of official structures: overt eroticism, breaking of taboos, masking and de-masking, bringing down of sacred discourses and elevating of the trivial. Carnival also appears to be a powerful liberating space where the nation is reborn and re-affirmed. What, however, creates a strong irony about this allegory is the implicit attributes that go along with the "carnival":

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[152] The concept of the "carnival" is sometimes used to designate a wide range of cultural and social phenomena of the time (cf. Hundorova' coinage of "Bu-Ba-Bu-ism" as a broader aesthetic, ideological and spiritual development, 2000).

this festivity is staged, it is temporary, it is an illusion and it inevitably comes to an end. As the "carnivalesque" cultural phenomenon was retrospectively examined in an interview with one of the poets of the group in 1995 (see Neborak), it was nostalgically conceptualized as an indispensable but naïve stage, which was bound to take place but was also bound to come to an end. The transition to the sobering "post-carnival" period comprises a paradigmatic syndrome of the "post-independence" nation in the broadest sense. It is characteristic that Andrukhovych's space of the carnivalesque cannot escape the problems of geopolitics; at the same time, however, the impossibility of breaking away from the dichotomies of power is expressed in his works not only by the totalitarian structures. The looming of the "more central" center after the collapse of the colonial administration dominates the political subtexts of the poet's oeuvre.

The complex movement and fluidity of the anti-colonial and post-colonial paradigms present one of the more interesting aspects of Andrukhovych's poetry.[153] His situatedness between the ghost of the colonial past and the encroaching Western culture constitutes a continuous tension within the space of his dichotomized world. The poet's archeology of the imperial history emphasizes the process of the repeated re-contextualization and displacement of the national self. His recovering of the multiple layers of the colonial past is actualized on various levels: thematic, allegoric, and linguistic (lexical). This is manifested particularly strongly in "Три балади" ("Three Ballads"), where the period of the Austrian empire comes alive through three scenes in the life of one city. In the casual description of the collapse of the city tower in "Лемберзька катастрофа 1826 р." ("The Lemberg[154] Catastrophe of 1826") as a "minor apocalypse" of the "tragic city" with insignificant human losses (one trumpeter, two soldiers and several labourers, 18), the poetic focus is on the connotation of the "minor" and "small" – in terms of the city's and its people's unimportance both in the general course of history and in the system of imperial hierarchies. Recreation of the text from the archival document (where the tragedy was documented) is done with a German accent, which enhances the perspectival "sideway glance" in the poem. The casual matter-of-factedness of "The Lemberg Catastrophe" is juxtaposed to the sarcastic commentary of "Нашіптування з віків" ("Whispering Across the Ages"), where the figure of the Austrian Emperor Franz-Joseph – significantly, referred to just as (Emperor) Joseph – becomes not only symbolic of the structures of imperial power, but is also implicit of another Joseph to come (Stalin). The poem is written in a form of a ceremonial praise/eulogy and is heavily laden with ironic layers of double meanings (cf. its play on the notion of "щаслива нація" [a "happy nation"], 20). It brings together two historical imperial spaces where both emperors are just disparate faces on the same symbolic body; thus, speaking of Franz-Joseph, the poet comments, "і де ще той двадцятий вік, в якому ти помреш?" (20).[155] Andrukhovych's direct references and allusions to the Marxist philosophy (e.g., “Фавстове свято” [“The Faustian Celebration”], 22) and frequent intrusions of other languages (Polish, Russian) into the poetic space he constructs create subtle and not so subtle subtexts of the power structures of the past. The invasion of the modern Western cultural values comes across in a more elusive way. After the decades of virtual isolation from the West, which holds particularly true for the ex-Soviet republics and ethnic minorities, the sudden exposure to and “accessibility” of the Western way of life and Western commodities (e.g., material goods, travel, as well as massive media exposure) change the culture that begins to experience an invasion of the Western world. In Andrukhovych’s poetry, the acknowledgment of this phenomenon is both ironic and serious; he engages in a play of intertextuality and parody of the culture of mass consumption, incorporates actual English and anglicized words, builds a network of various allusions to the Western culture, and emphasizes globalization (or internalization) of the local. Thus, in “Пам’ятник” (“The Monument”), his mention of Iaremcha (a small mountainous resort town in the western part of the country) in the same line that contains references to Hollywood, Hong Kong, Geneva and San Remo (75) is facetious, consciously pretentious, ironic and serious all at once (also see below for the discussion of “Козак Ямайка” [“Cossack Jamaica”]). The motif of the commodification of culture is also present in the very frame theme of the collection: the poetic world constructed by Andrukhovych is a medieval zoo, a fair, a circus scene, a performance of an illusionist; it is an eclectic show that is an allegory for the world itself. Everything is for sale, and he is the one at the door, selling the tickets (cf. his “Circus Vagabundo” cycle). On another level, however, the poet’s situating himself in the position of an ultimate control is a self-reflexive commentary on his poetic world: “Але я замовкаю. / Це тільки ззовні цирк. ... / Я зупиняю механізм. Я касу замикаю” (70).[156] He is the one who orchestrates the performance and opens/closes it at will, and the reader is invited to share in the slightly treacherous world of his metaphysical fair.

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[153] On the differentiation between anti-colonial and post-colonial paradigms see Pavlyshyn 1992a.

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[154] Lemberg is a German name of the present-day city of Lviv in Western Ukraine, given to it during the period of the Austrian empire.

[155] "and it's still a while before the twentieth century, in which you die...." Here and further, all original quotations of Andrukhovych's poetry are from Andrukhovych, Irvanets,' and Neborak (1995).

Postcolonial Reality, Postmodernist Perspective

The points of tension at the crossroads of the postcolonial and postmodernist concerns can be situated primarily around the issues of history, truth, and subject. The issue of history, instrumental to the continuity of national identity, is central to the paradigmatic postcolonial narrative and also closely related to the positivistic concept of truth. The recovery of the (objective) history and reinstallment of the (historical) truth constitutes one of the political goals of the postcolonial narrative. The (post)colonial desire for the recovery of one’s identity, however, clashes with the postmodernist subversion of the notion of history as a narrative construct and with the rejection of the logocentric truth. Andrukhovych’s poetry is an open system, a multi-dimensional space that creates the impossibility of grounding an epistemic center. The poet deconstructs the romantic concept of nation, history – and creativity – on many levels. Thus, the times of messianic art are hopelessly gone (he is perpetually ironic towards himself and fellow poets as well as their oeuvre; cf. “The Monument,” 75, to quote just one example[157]). His reflections on history and continuously surfacing memories of the haunting realia of the past are consistently informed by the postmodernist perspective: he reexamines the positivistic view of history and questions the very possibility of knowing the past. The (re)construction of the jigsaw puzzle of history is never finalized, and the poet openly plays with its pieces, whether it is a liberal retelling of a historical fact (complete however, with the reference to archives for that touch of authenticity, as in "The Lemberg catastrophe of 1826"), a search for his love lost "десь отам, / між ренесансом і бароко..." (10),[158] or a more general examination of the complex societal condition where the nation is struggling to cope with the collapse of the many established structures. The medieval city of his dreams and many affections (the actual city of Lviv), where he situates much of his poetry of the time, becomes a point of departure on the spatio-temporal scale of history. The poet's love affair with the city also translates into his essential need for history: his union with the past is holistic and cathartic. However, the search for meaning and knowledge through the "glass darkly" of centuries is often a disappointing exercise. Thus, a character in one of his untitled poems "збирав колекцію із вражень / від замків, підземель, монастирів, / уламків, сходів, келій та дворів / і

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[156] “But I am falling silent. / It only seems like it’s a circus. ... / I stop the mechanism. I lock the cash register.”

[157] “The Monument” is a witty parody on the long tradition of many poets’ ambition to immortalize themselves through their poetry – beginning with Horace’s Ode iii.30,

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"Exegi monumentum aere perennius," and continuing with Shakespeare, Pushkin, and many others. Andrukhovych's vision of his and his friends' own monument – not symbolic, but a real one – is a lot more down to earth, and is strongly de-sanctified: the passing tourists can hardly recall their names, street boys write obscenities on the stone, and the "heavenly crow" dutifully leaves its mark on the heads of the poets' statues.

[158] "somewhere there / between the renaissance and the baroque."

слухав, що каміння врешті скаже... // Але воно мовчало..." (12).[159] The problem of collective memory as a carrier of historical knowledge and the impossibility of its containment present some of the more significant issues in Andrukhovych. Viewed through the usual for him symbolics of urban topoi, knowledge, mediated by the subjectivity of human memory, becomes an ambivalent quest: "Тільки крізь нас переходять міста / у непам'ять. / Ми вимовляємо їх / і знаходимо іншими"(46),[160] "Є міста, до яких неможливо / зайти. // І приносять великий ключ, і шукають, / куди б устромити, але / брам немає, сторожа зітерлась / на порох. Сім вітрів розкошують / на площах і в залах" (44).[161] Although the poet tends to be elusive about politicizing his discourse in an explicit way, his seemingly neutral reflections on the past are still significant. In his conceptualization of national history, Andrukhovych situates the historical space as a play of multiple ontological layers, as a complex palimpsest of many narratives, where it is impossible to decipher the original text and the meanings are becoming ever more blurry and ambivalent.

One of the more significant aspects of the poet's oeuvre, so characteristic of the condition of postcoloniality, is the continuous negotiation between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, or between the international and the local. In negotiating postcolonial identity, "the conflict of allegiance between one's immediate national society and the larger world" creates a constant tension (Ojaide 91). One of the manifestations of this tension in the discussed poetic selection is the combined use of the elements of folkloric culture (be it a specific traditional poetic form, a system of folkloric images, or an intertextual link drawing on particular oral/traditional narratives) and postmodernist techniques. The use of traditional poetic forms and elements of folklore undoubtedly "ha[s] a cultural validation" (Ojaide 86), which embraces not only the emphasis on the "local," national cultural space within the bigger poetic space, but also the redefinition of the ethnic as an inherent part of the modern national identity.[162]

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[159] "collected impressions / of castles, dungeons, monasteries, / ruins, stairs, monks' cells and yards, / and listened to what the stones would say at last... // But they remained silent...."

[160] "it is only through us that cities pass / to un-memory. / We pronounce them / and find them different."

[161] "[t]here are cities that are impossible to enter through a gate / There are cities that are impossible to enter // And they bring a huge key, and they look for a place to insert it, but / there is no gate, the guards all crumbled / to dust. Seven winds are sweeping / across its squares and halls."

Andrukhovych displays similar dichotomization of the Ukrainian cultural space and mediation between tradition and modernity in his use of folkloric material, folkloric topoi, and archaic poetic language of the tradional folkloric poetry. The theme of the fair or traveling performers (with many variations on the topic), different folk celebrations, play with images of the Christian tradition, and re-contextualized use of the prayer (e.g., "Пісня про пана Базя" "The Song of Mr. Baz'") and lamentation (cf. "Ламентація, або ж плач патріарха..." "Lamentation or the Patriarch's Cry...") constitute an important aspect of his poetic creativity. It is noteworthy that in Andrukhovych the topos of the street performance assumes two distinct manifestations: as a globalized, cosmopolitan, transnational and transhistorical fair/circus, and as a localized, grounded in the national traditions image of the fair, Christmas street performance, or a folk celebration. Andrukhovych's extension of the local and national into the larger, international context and his resort to the topoi of the West acquires a variety of meanings in the framework of his poetry; in particular, it can be read in several contexts: 1) the juxtaposition of his "provincial," peripheralized culture to the "other" of the West, 2) the simultaneous placement of it alongside and together with the West, 3) the possibility of a subconscious nostalgia for the pure, authentic beauty of the "essentially" national that can no longer be contained in the narrow, self-sufficient discourse of the national culture (cf. "Пастух..." "Shepherd..." or the ending of "Cossack Jamaica"). This process is particularly explicit in his "Cossack Jamaica" – the poet plays on the original name of cossack Mamaj – where the hero is situated in the Western cultural environment. This wonderfully colourful image belongs to the quintessentially Ukrainian folkloric character (borrowed from a well-known painting). He is given a non-Ukrainian /non-Slavic name and becomes an eternal time-traveler, moving across the ages and crossing the cultural borders. Ironically, Jamaica and generally tropical topoi (Bahama and Haiti), themselves the battlefields of post-colonial tensions, become representative of the exotic landscapes associated with the quintessentially Western ideas of luxury, leisure and consumerism. Cosmopolitization of the paradigmatic national character and his displacement through the global context and through the deconstruction of the sacred space of "home" comprises a significant statement: it is both a break from the tradition and the tradition's continuity; it is also the desire to be part of the world yet to retain the identifiable national features. Situating the traditional national self (closed, conservative and solidly rooted in the past) in the contemporary scene (open, cosmopolitan and eclectic) manifests a typical negotiation of the centre versus periphery relations. The ambivalent double-facetedness – or universality – of the local constitutes precisely the implicit subtext of Andrukhovych's poetic project. His use of the folklore material is very far from the naive and simplistic glorification of the national: it is a recontextualized and critically / ironically distanced recycling of the folkloric inventory.

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[162] The tension between the traditional models of culture and the conception of modernity and "modern" nation is characteristic of the processes of identity construction in peripheral cultures. Cf. Ojaide, who emphasizes the significance of the incorporation and re-conceptualization of folkloric tradition in the discourse of modern ethnicity (34). Also, see the study of Balinska-Ourdeva (1998), based on one of the prose writings of Andrukhovych, where she argues that the detached, critically distanced use of folklore is ultimately embodied in the process of re-discovery of the modern national self. The folkloric texts are denied "the elevated status of being the ultimate embodiments of the national psyche," and are "subjected to a consumable ... revival that leads to their irrevocable transformation and modernization" (211). Thus, the oral tradition is being "appropriated without excessive 'nationalist' sentiments" (ibid.).

The poet's postmodern world construction is defined by his emphasis on discursivity, multiplicity of meanings, play with words and contexts, negotiation between the reality and fiction, self-reflexivity, and multiple tiers of intertextuality. Andrukhovych is overtly explicit about the playful and "consumer friendly" quality of his poetry. His incorporation of low-style jargon and the general "mass culture" appeal of his work, however, do not erase the unmistakable sophistication of his poetry, which layers subtexts and meanings that are potentially accessible only to a more informed reader. Thus, through parodic intertextuality, one of the more important aspects of his poetic oeuvre, he embraces not only themes, images and models from folkloric culture, as shown above, but also biblical contexts and more particular and subtle cases of intertextuality (e.g., implicit allusions to Horace and his "followers" in his "Monument," bu also direct references to the Ukrainian poetess Natalka Bilotserkivets' and the

Peruvian poet César Vallejo). Particularly significant are his re-workings of the experimental models of the national historical avant-garde (cf. the ending of "Shepherd...," 53, based on the play of rhymes and sound-form of the word, meaning and nonsense).[163]

The poet explicitly manipulates the juxtaposition of illusion versus reality (cf. my earlier discussion of his "Circus 'Vagabundo'," where the character is the creator of his own world/"show"). Self-reflectivity is also found in the very organizational principle of the discussed poetic collection, where Andrukhovych collides different fictional worlds, allowing his characters to travel freely between them. The selected works of the poet in the cited collection are organized as a retrospective overview of both his poetry and prose, where prose quotations (original excerpts from his novel *Recreations*) serve as a cohesive framework and a commentary on his poetry through the prism of his characters' eyes. This elaborate meta-structure provides an ironic glance from askance at his own oeuvre, where the spectators – all of them characters from *Recreations* – for a moment become the audience of his poetic show. It is noteworthy that the novel itself is built around the theme of a popular festivity where the characters are both spectators and participants. Examples of this self-reflexive, metafictional game include both performative and critical elements. Thus, one of Andrukhovych's earlier poems is incorporated into the collection through the act of reading by one of his characters from *Recreations* (who tries to pass the poem as his own). There are nostalgic commentaries on the role of poetry in today's world ("Я, здається, знаю, що сталося, – підніс обважнілу від вина голову Мартофляк. – Здається, минула молодість. Епоха неоромантизму плавно переросла в епідемію СНІДу. Я забув, як пишуться вірші, хлоп'ята," 25).[164] The concluding prose excerpt at the end of the collection is a tongue-in-cheek commentary on Andrukhovych's poetic wrtings: "А я майже нічого не зрозуміла, – зізналася Марта. – Я й сам не все там розумію, – погодився Хомський, – однак чимось воно мені дуже подобається," 76).[165] Thus, structurally, the collection itself is turned into a playground of different ontologies, and the theme of carnival unites both the meta-narrative of prose quotations and the poetry itself. The double-tieredness of the carnival theme and structure – as well as a distinct double perspective offered to the reader – is significant here. As Hundorova claims,

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[163] A version of this discussion of Andrukhovych's poetry has been published as a book article; see Sywenky, Irene. "Postcolonial Context, Postmodernist Perspective: Niyi Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* and Yuri Andrukhovych's Carnival Poetry." *The People's Poet: Emerging Perspectives on Niyi Osundare*. Ed. A.-R. Na'Allah. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003. 373-90.

> Карнавал як утопічний ідеал привласнюється стратегіями офіційної культури, з одного боку, або інтегрується маскультурою, з іншого боку. Натомість карнавалізація як текстуальний феномен реалізується, коли розгортається подвійний modus ludus, себто коли формується подвійна наративна структура, де ідеалізована фікція зіставляється і деконструюється своєю

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[164] "I think I know what happened," Martofliak lifted his head, heavy from wine. "I think our youth is gone. The epoch of neoromanticism has smoothly grown into the epoch of AIDS. I forgot how to write poetry, boys."

[165] "I have understood almost nothing," confessed Marta. "I don't get it all either," agreed Khomsky, " but somehow I like it very much."

> власною пародією. В цьому подвійному сенсі карнавалізації як текстуальності можна говорити про постмодернізм як пост-Карнавал. (284)[166]

Andrukhovych's carnivalesque undoubtedly belongs to the space of post-carnival, where both play and freedom are viewed ironically, and where the poet never allows the reader to forget the constructed nature of the transgressive act.

Oksana Zabuzhko

Ukrainian women's literature of the 1990s cannot be discussed adequately without mentioning the name of Oksana Zabuzhko, whose novel *Польові дослідження з українського сексу* [*Field Work in Ukrainian Sex*, 1996] became not only a quintessential feminist text of the decade, but also a catalyst to much of the feminist debate at the time. An academician with a graduate degree in philosophy, a Fulbright Fellow and a lecturer at several major American universities, Zabuzhko at the same time became known as a poet, an essayist, and a prose writer. Her *Field Work* provoked much controversy and outrage as it touched on many sensitive issues and taboos, bringing together the plane of the deeply personal and individual, and the plane of a collective female/feminine consciousness. The latter transcends the limitations of a traditional gendered perspective, acquiring distinct socio-cultural subtexts. Economics and politics of sex and sexuality have been one of the focal points of critical gender theory since the articulation of these ideas in the French feminist theory of the 1970s and 80s, e.g., in the writing of Cixous (Cixous and Clément [1975] 1986) and Irigaray ([1974] 1990, 1977); as reflected through the prism of poststructuralism, sexuality as a social and cultural structure and an ideologically shaped discursive/ narrative space was given a new conceptualization in the seminal works of Foucault (1976-84). Betraying self-reflexive awareness of the theoretical problematics of the Western discourse on gender and inevitably engaging in an academic dialogue, Zabuzhko's articulation of the sexual agency is located at the intersection of a complex set of ideological, psychoanalytical, narrative, and historical perspectives.

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[166] "On one hand, carnival as a utopian ideal is appropriated by the strategies of the official culture; on the other hand, it is integrated by popular culture. The carnivalesque as a textual phenomenon, however, is actualized when a double *modus ludus* is developed, that is when a double narrative structure is formed where the idealized fiction is deconstructed by its own parody. In this double sense of the carnivalesque, we can speak of postmodernism as a post-carnival."

Reading Sexuality as a Postcolonial Space

Zabuzhko's exploration of the discourse of sexuality cannot be separated from her fascination with the interplay of the social/public and individual/private in the context of the totalitarian and post-totalitarian structures. In one of the interviews, the author herself acknowledged that "[s]exual life belongs almost entirely to that 'invisible part' of our existence.... So, what particularly tantalized me while working on the book was to examine precisely how that massive, dark, and powerful mainstream of history affects, quite surreptitiously, people's most unconscious behavior" (2001 n.p.). Zabuzhko explores the process of formation of the sexual subject as belonging inherently in the socio-historical context. Thus, the author's narration of one woman's existential journey through relationships is a lot more than a novel-length series of erotic adventures, as the title seems to claim. (Ironically, although the book had acquired a lot of scandalous notoriety even before it was published, there is very little in it that can be categorized as pornographic or even purely erotic.). The narrator's introspective reflections unwittingly encroach into what seems like unrelated areas and quickly turn into an examination of Ukrainian history, cultural identity and patterns of social behaviour. Zabuzhko herself admits that to her sexuality and sex – both as a private and a public realm – is an imprint of deeper and more troubling signs of long-rooted social problems:

> One reviewer observed that these "studies in sex" are nothing but a "pathogenesis of our solitude," meaning solitude not just in personal terms, but also in historical, cultural, and even linguistic terms. .... Ukrainian history: a lost, "forgotten" country, with a historical memory that's been deliberately erased, subjected for so long to all kinds of humiliation – and every social humiliation affects men much more strongly than it does women. ... As a result, in the end it is always women upon whom men take revenge for their defeats "out in the world." (2001 n.p.)

To the author, collective patterns of sexual behaviour serve as one of the indicators of social health – or, respectively, pathology. Zabuzhko's study in "pathogenesis" is as much a study of the psychological deviations in conceptualizing femininity and female space as it is also a closer look at the distortions of masculinity and male space. Her theorizing of the male pathological drive to sexual control links it – as a compensatory mechanism – to the collective as well as individual male "impotence" in the socio-economic and political sphere throughout the long history of the denial of the nation's identity, dignity, self-determination and autonomy. Although this argument may be found fundamentally flawed with the confining of the male gender to the traditional social roles associated with masculinity (and thus men's suffering from the lack of agency – social or other – is merely one of the manifestations of the deeply internalized stereotypes), there is no doubt that the failure or impossibility to find fulfilment and recognition in the social sphere bears on the domestic and sexual sphere. The author is clear, however, in emphasizing the universal human aspect of the problem:

> That the book uncovered behind this "invincible" make-up a deeply hidden insecurity and social helplessness was, of course, taken as a feminist "cultural answer." ... What I attacked was, basically, a system of social lies extending to the point of mental rape, and affecting both men and women. That is why I don't divide my readers along male/female lines. (2001 n.p.)

The *Field Work* is presented as a first-person narrative, which is meant to create a more intimate bond with the reader. Zabuzhko argues that "if the novel was to articulate certain things which Ukrainian literature has never articulated before, and be heard, all these dark and dirty secrets HAD to be pronounced 'in the first person,' as a part of the author's most personal existential experience" (2001 n.p., emphasis in the original; in the same interview she acknowledges that "*Field Work* can be called confessional literature. Of course, it is, in many ways, an autobiographical novel" [ibid.]). But even within the structure of a first-person narration the author is continuously oscillating between the private and public discourses. For the most part, the protagonist is engrossed in an interior monologue, talking to herself as she is trying to come to terms with her life; in places it appears that her narrative is addressed to a close friend of hers. At the same time, however, the story periodically acquires the form and style of an official academic presentation that is delivered, presumably, during the narrator's trip to the United States. This on-going negotiation of the implied audience is quite significant as it runs parallel to the negotiation of the (rather precarious) line that separates a highly intimate subject matter and a straightforward discussion of social and political issues. The impossibility to separate the private, individual and psychosexual on the one hand, and the social and political, on the other, constitutes one of the main aspects of the novel's problematic. The narrator's fragmented reminiscences about her childhood and her parents develop, on another level, into the story of the whole nation and its convoluted, tortured history. The feeling of helplessness and of a deeply internalized fear, both individual and collective ("Страх починався рано. Страх передавався у спадок," Zabushko 1996, 127),[167] is the same pathological fear that eventually grows into the need to dominate and abuse (as a response to domination and abuse) and runs in generations of men – in the protagonist's narrative, from her father to the series of men she will encounter later in her life.

One of the more important thematic elements in the novel is the same inevitable pair of dichotomies: Ukraine versus Russia and Ukraine versus the West. In the context of the former, foregrounding the factor of the colonial and postcolonial reality in the formation of the psychological make-up of an individual is certainly not new. To mind comes Fanon's earlier theorizing of colonial subjectivity and the inevitable separation of the self and the "other" in the conditions of coloniality and, at least in part, postcoloniality

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[167] "Fear started early. Fear was passed on from generation to generation." Here and further all translation of Zabuzhko is mine.

(see 1967, 1968). Zabuzhko's argument about the colonial subject's inability to restore the centrality of the self bears primarily on the psychosexual aspect of subjectivity. Although the narrator's focus is mainly on the examination of the dynamics of the heterosexual relationship and male psychology, her "research" – whether she realizes it or not – is just as relevant for the representative problems of female sexuality.[168] Thus, for example, apart from her internalized essentialist assumptions about femininity – which can provide material for a separate analysis – the radical separation of the protagonist's body from her self is highly significant in the context of the economic and political separation of the national self from the material "body" (manifested in the "ownership" of the language, culture, land etc.). Incorporation of the Western geopolitical space in the novel (e.g., the narrator's life in the US and her speaking in part from within the Western academic structure) further enhances the relativistic perspective and establishes a broader frame of reference (e.g., one of the narrator's American friends' commentaries on the"East European" men vs. "Western" men, cf. 141). A similar function is fulfilled by the linguistic spaces of Russian and English, which emphasize the narrator's suspension and indeterminate positioning between the two worlds, each one of them "owning" the protagonist's Ukrainianness in a different way. This is one reason why Zabuzhko's book escapes any possibility of an adequate translation: the ideology of language is all-pervasive and forms an inherent part of the novel's narrative fabric. Persistent encroachment of Russian – or, a badly Russified Ukrainian – into the linguistic space of the narrator acquires curious materiality and becomes like a physical invasion that has distinct colonial subtexts to it. It is noteworthy that a lot of distorted, vulgarized and Russified Ukrainian comes from her lover, whose sexual agency needs to be reinforced and legitimized by the linguistic agency with its distinctly imperial undertones. The presence of English establishes a different point of reference, which at the same time creates a different standard – cultural and other – to which somehow the narrator's world does not measure up. The English linguistic medium serves the paradoxical effect of both structuring and appropriating the protagonist's world and its "enigma" (or "Slavic mysticism," 120, English in the original) through scholarly discourse, but also failing to do so and thus emphasizing the impossibility of its containment within an academic structure. The narrator's defiant and deliberately conversational style resists any subordination to the structures of Western discourse (cf. her addressing an academic audience: "прошу ще тільки хвилиночку уваги, в мене навіть ... цитата осьо наготована – перепрошую, що не з Дерріда, Фуко чи Лакана," 120).[169]

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[168] Throughout the novel, it is never quite clear to what extent the narrator (and the author?) is conscious of the fact that she is speaking not only *from* the female perspective, but also *of* the female perspective, therefore critically dissecting not only her partner(s)' patterns of behaviour and typical situational responses but also those of her own. Among other more analytical details, she often resorts to her own ethnicity as a point of reference, thus reinforcing the significance of the socio-historical factor – the line she pursues throughout the entire narrative (e.g., "якого чорта було родитися на світ жінкою (та ще й в Україні!) – із цією блядською *залежністю*, закладеною в тіло, як бомба сповільненої дії," 18, emphasis in the original; "... as though it's not enough to have been born a woman (and, on top of that, in Ukraine!) with this fucking *dependence* in your body, like a ticking time bomb..."). At the same time, however, her highly emotional and deliberately "unscientific" confessions emphasize the lack of any objective "distance" and may serve more as a research material in themselves than a legitimate research commentary. Thus, the narrator's persona as a "researcher" continuously shifts in status from being an observer and a commentator to being an actual object of a potential study. It may very well be one of the subtler implications of the narrative to make the reader see the ambivalence of the narrator's perspective and self-positioning within her discourse.

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[169] "please one moment of your attention, ... I even have a quote ready here ... – my apologies, it's not from Derrida, Foucault or Lacan."

One of the more important dimensions of Zabuzhko's style is its play with postmodern discursivity, which, in the context of this novel, translates into conceptualization of language and word as one of the potentially liberating female spaces. The novel has no clear structure and no plot in the traditional sense. The narrative represents the fluid space of the female protagonist's memory, feelings, and word-meanings. Zabuzhko's writing in *Field Work* is a quintessential example of *écriture féminine*, which is not so much a "female" writing as it is a liberated writing, free from structure and rigid form:

> This "style," or "writing," of women tends to put the torch to fetish words, proper terms, well-constructed forms. This "style" does not privilege sight[170]; instead, it takes each figure back to its source which is among other things tactile. It comes back in touch with itself in that origin without ever constituting in it, constituting itself in it, as some sort of unity. ... It is always *fluid*.... Its "style" resist and explodes every firmly established form, figure, idea or concept. (Irigaray 1998, 572, emphasis in the original)

Zabuzhko creates a self-sufficient, self-contained female narrative space, where the "outside" (i.e. pertaining to the imperial/patriarchal structures) laws and restrictions do not apply; she subverts syntax and grammar, ignores every stylistic decorum, and enjoys the sensual, "tactile" quality of her writing. Her language is bodily, and her stream-of-consciousness narration establishes an open, fluid, borderless space.

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[170] In this context, sight is to be understood as associated with (male) rationality, logical thinking and containing/appropriating experiential knowledge through theoretical concepts and structures (cf. Ryvkin and Ryan 573).

Particularly important place is devoted to her poetry, which punctuates the entire narrative and serves as moments of "rupture" in the fabric of her narrative, as windows into a different consciousness that has higher awareness and knowledge – the kind of knowledge and knowing that do not subordinate to structures of rational thinking.

Although in her *Field Work in Ukrainian Sex* Zabuzhko plays with many conventions of postmodern writing (such as parodying academic fiction, subverting the conventions of the academic discourse, deliberately playing with and exploiting autobiographical and fictional aspects of her writing, and taking the potential of language to its logical extreme), ultimately her project is subordinated to an exploration of some very specific social issues: examination of the effects of a long-term historical trauma on an individual and collective psyche, and a psychologically crippling impact of the conditions of colonial dependence on the mentality of generations of people.

III.4 Russian Post-Totalitarian Postmodernism: Historiographic Games in the Post-Imperial Age

Valerii Zalotukha

Valerii Zalotukha, a journalist by education, became known in the late 1980s - early 1990s as an award-winning screenplay writer and prose writer. He belongs to the strand of Russian post-totalitarian postmodernism that became engaged primarily with the problematics of history: the significance of history as a discourse, meaning of history in a totalitarian society, deconstruction and rewriting of history, and turning the official metanarrative of history into a play field of parodic, subversive, and often absurdist disourses. Revisionist treatment of history is certainly not an original theme, and has been exploited very productively in Western postmodernism since at least the 1970s (cf. Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* [1973], Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* [1977], D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* [1981], or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* [1980], to name just a few examples). This theme, however, acquires a qualitatively different subtext in the context of post-totalitarian societies. Although both traditions converge on the ground of more general issues, such as the deconstruction of the unitary truth and questioning of the narrative/discursive knowledge, the treatment of the subject in East European and, in particular, Russian literature is more engaged with the immediate socio-political and historical context and the implications of a revisionist reading of history for the understanding of the nation's more contemporary concerns. If the Western tradition emphasizes apocryphal or alternative history[171] and rather unabashedly feeds on the modern reader's infatuation with the theories of global conspiracy and "secret" histories, East European re-evaluation of history is quintessentially ideological because it inherently engages in speaking back to the past meta-narratives. This model of re-appropriation of the narrative of history is closer to Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction (1988).

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[171] See McHale's (1987, 90-93). McHale claims that "[a]pocryphal history contradicts the official version in one of two ways: either it *supplements* the historical record, claiming to restore what has been lost or suppressed; or it *displaces* official history altogether" (90, emphasis in the original). In the first case, alternative/apocryphal history strives to fill the gaps in the popular and/or scientific historical knowledge; although on the surface level it conforms to the norms of the classical historical discourse, it in fact often parodies the official discourse of history and its assumptions. In the second case, alternative history offers a radically different version of the past, thus introducing an ontological hesitation or "flickering" between the two worlds/realities (ibid.)

As McHale puts it (drawing on Winston Churchill), the official history is a history of the winners (1987, 90). In the broader context, this is true of all colonial and post-colonial societies. Post-colonial revisionist treatment of history, however, can vary from serious attempts at the restoration of the historical truth and articulation of a new official history (the centrifugal movement of the post-colonial culture towards "center") to engaging in a play of meanings, multiple truths and micronarratives (the centripetal deconstructive impetus away from the hegemonic center). If the period immediately preceding and following the collapse of the empire is usually marked by a quest for cultural authenticity and, thus, a heightened desire to restore the historical truth – usually from the perspective of the marginalized or silenced groups/ethnicities (cf. Fanon's [1968] stage of nativist consciousness), the later stages of postcoloniality are characterized by a more distanced and critical perspective. Thus, for example, Rushdie's rather frivolous handling of history in his *Midnight's Children* is both postcolonial and postmodernist. It is distinctly postcolonial in the sense that the narrator cannot escape the dichotomy of India versus Britain/West; this binarism permeates all the aspects of the narrative and becomes thematic. On the other hand, Rushdie's refusal to take history seriously is distinctly postmodernist (the best example of this is his stylization of the novel as a parody of the epic, which, towards the end, becomes more like a fairy tale). Not only he refuses to treat "objectivity" of history seriously, but he also explicitly ridicules many issues, e.g., India's independence as a solution for all of its problems and the mythology of the very idea of "Indianness" – which would have been sacrilegious a few decades before the publication of the novel.

The postmodernist trend of rewriting history is especially significant in the case of Russian literature as part of the post-imperial Russian cultural space, because in this case the empire looks back at itself – an essentially self-reflexive act of meditation on its own historical practices, its past and present in a broader socio-political context.[172] Valerii Zalotukha's novel *Velikii pohod za osvobozhdenie Indii* (*The Great March for the Liberation of India*, 1995) is representative of all of the above issues discussed in association with "historical" postmodernism. The novel can be categorized as an example of a "secret" history (using McHale's classification), as it claims to reveal an entirely unknown aspect of the Soviet historical past, the knowledge of which was passed along from generation to generation of political leaders and was carefully concealed from public knowledge. Playing with the notion of international revolution (which goes back to the tradition of classical Marxism), Zalotukha constructs a different version of the early Soviet history, in which the October 1917 events in Russia were just the beginning of the making of a new history. Making fun of both the grandiosity of the political design characteristic of the early years of the Soviet rule and the carefully masked colonial ambition that was veiled under the noble mission of the "international revolution," the novel uncovers the "truth" about the other side of the early Soviet politics: the grand military mission for the liberation of colonial India from the British rule in the period following the events of 1917. By situating Russia in an international context, the author engages in a double play: Russia as a powerful empire-in-the-making versus its potential colonies (that is a legitimate "centre" in its own right) and Russia versus West. The latter dichotomy is an apt commentary on Russia's centuries long negotiation of the ambiguity of its mediating position between East and West – as both centre and periphery.

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[172] Again, the use of the concept of "post-imperial" has to be qualified in this context. Here the Russian nation is referred to as post-imperial in the context of the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991. In many ways, however, it still remains part of the older imperial paradigm as it is struggling to come to terms with the loss of its former role of the political and economic imperial centre; many of its today's politically motivated decisions and actions are unmistakably driven by the ambitions of the old empire. At the same time, the concept of "post-empire" is applicable as it connotes a major shift in the country's political status (which the disintegration of the Soviet bloc undoubtedly was) since the early 1990s.

Behind every secret history – whether real or fictional – there are reasons for suppressing the truth. Fictional histories make particular emphasis on playing with the issue of authenticity, which creates a continuous space of ontological hesitation for the reader: i.e. oscillation between the knowledge of the "real," textbook history and the realization that the apocryphal version is clearly a product of imagination, yet oddly logical, and, thus, possible. In Zalotukha's fictional world the conspiracy served to cover up a major political fiasco: making the events in India public would have been an embarrassment both to the Soviet and the British sides. It would have been discrediting to the latter because of the inability of the British troops to form an organized military resistance; and, particularly, to the former because of the gradual disintegration of the troops and the failure of the ideological mission. What constitutes the biggest irony is the fact that what appears to be a highly unlikely situation (i.e. keeping secret a major military operation) certainly sounds plausible in the context of the Soviet history.

Desecration of Official History

The common postmodernist theme of rewriting the narrative of history acquires different subtexts in the post-Soviet societies. In the context of totalitarian structures official history constitutes one of the more important ideological apparatuses. As one of the totalitarian metanarratives, official history serves to assert a unitary truth and enforces a very specific perspective on (or "reading" of) the selected events of the past to ensure the ideological justification and continuity of certain social/political practices. In this sense, rereading of history goes beyond a mere postmodernist "playing" with the sign. It is ideologically "sacrilegious" because through questioning of the past it questions the present. In the case of Zalotukha's novel, however, the act of "sacrilege" is distinctly parodic and light-hearted as it plunders the artefact of history through the perspective of the post-totalitarian society. Thus, it is distinctly double-tiered, as it rereads not only the history itself, but also the very practice of rereading the history as a quintessential postcolonial/post-imperial recovery of truth. The novel is particularly interesting because it subverts the most canonical part of the Soviet history: its early years complete with the iconic figures of Lenin and Stalin among other well-known names. Thus, here the violation of the sacred "text" of history is performed for the mere pleasure of violation or desecration, as an inscription of a different historical truth itself is not the goal (moreover, the alternative historical "truth" is just as logical as it is nonsensical, and it is as nonsensical as is the textbook Soviet history itself).

It is significant that the author approaches the issue of alternative history (i.e. its "discovery") through the prism of archeology, which both creates an "objective," scientific perspective and gives a clear implication of the historical distance that separates the moment of narration from the events that form the focus of the story. The indication of the historical distance emphasizes the "ancient" quality of the issue in question and the interest it may have for archeology rather than its relevance for the present. At the same time, the narrator's insistence on the importance of the "truth" creates a strong parodic context:

> Все тайное однажды становится явным. Пришло время узнать самую большую и самую сокровенную тайну великой русской революции. Она настолько невероятна, что у кого-то может вызвать сомнения. Сомневающимся придется напомнить слова вождя революции Владимира Ильича Ленина, сказанные им накануне этих пока еще никому не известных событий: "Путь на Париж и Лондон лежит через города Афганистана, Пенджаба и Бенгалии." Не знать о великом походе за освобождение Индии значит не знать правды нашей истории. (10)[173]

Here everything is double-coded: the narrator's reference to "secrets" in history (which acquires particular significance in the context of Soviet history laden with numerous cover-ups), playing with the concept of the "truth," and the liberal treatment of citations as a strategy of authentication (again, a parodic commentary on a totalitarian society's obsession with the political leaders' "quotables"). The reference to "our history" is distinctly ironic as it not only plays with the idea of the newly discovered facts as a collective heritage of importance and history as a communal experience (the rhetorical inclusiveness of "our"), but also appeals to a false sentiment of pride.

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[173] "Everything secret becomes known some time. It's time to unveil the truth about the best kept secret of the Russian revolution. It is so incredible that some readers may have doubts. Those in doubt we should remind of the words of Vladimir Iliych Lenin, uttered on the eve of the events that still remain unknown: "The way to Paris and London lies through the cities of Afghanistan, Punjabi and Benghal." Not to know the truth about the great march for the liberation of India means not to know the truth about our history." Here and further, all translation of Zalotukha's text is mine.

Zalotukha's narrative engages in questioning many issues of historiography, such as the selectivity of the analyzed material, the problem of perspective, interpretation and subjectivity, and the writer's/scholar's control over, and manipulation of, the (discursive) facts. The most significant aspect of Zalotukha's revisionist treatment of historiography, however, is his emphasis on the problem of simulacrum. Although the interpretation of the metanarrative of history as a discursive simulation of the past reality (to ascribe more substance/ meaning to the present reality) became a commonplace postmodernist (re)reading of traditional historiographic assumptions, this issue acquires different ideological subtexts in the context of the Soviet history – or, by extension, any totalitarian society. For instance, as discussed earlier in Chapter 1, there has been an attempt to theorize early postmodernity in the Soviet Russia on the grounds that the whole society functioned in a construct of enforced discursive simulation (see Epstein). As opposed, however, to a situation where the transition was historically gradual (cf. Baudrillard's theory of the society of mass consumption and third-order simulacra), the introduction of simulacra in Russia and later Soviet republics and satellite states was abrupt and forceful. Thus, although the official reality – the simulacrum – was the most pervasive, i.e. public, space (e.g., media, education, culture among other structures and institutions), the population was largely conscious of the discrepancy between the two ontologies;

therefore, there had always been a critical distance in the perception and processing of the officially generated knowledge and awareness of the inherent irony and a "gap" between the public and the private spheres. Zalotukha takes this idea further by constructing a fictional situation where not only the Soviet historical reality was discursively manipulated, but the very icon on which the whole simulacra structure rested was false/unauthentic/substitutable. The author plays with the idea of a surrogate Lenin, which has a twofold implication: it questions the legitimacy of the role of this political leader in shaping the destiny of entire nations; it also foregrounds the fact that in a simulated reality it is signification that constitutes a meaningful, "authentic" experience. In the following instance, where Stalin, Trotsky and a fictional character are watching the real Lenin (at the same time being aware of the existence of the surrogate figure), the iconic representation ironically takes precedence over the actual person:

> Ленин спал, лежа на спине, и был больше похож на покойного, чем на спящего. Сталин, Троцкий и Новик смотрели на него с горестным любопытством.
>
> – А Шишкин наш больше похож, – сообщил шепотом Новик.
>
> – На кого? – удивился Сталин.
>
> – На Ленина. (60)[174]

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[174] "Lenin was sleeping, lying on his back, and looked more like a deceased than a resting person. Stalin, Trotsky and Novik were contemplating him with pitiful curiosity.
'Our Shishkin has more resemblance,' whispered Novik.
'To whom?' asked Stalin in a surprised tone.
'To Lenin'."

Here the icon, the image acquires a life of its own – the duplicate Lenin is "better" than his prototype. Throughout the novel the author undoubtedly plays with the further implication that the original may have never existed in the sense that it was a product of the collective imagination, a discursive construct, a metanarrative; this extends into a metaphor of a perfect simulacrum where the representation not only takes over the signified, but, ultimately, rejects the original. Zalotukha's deconstruction of the entire metanarrative of the Soviet history is also significant because it is based on the collapse of the single signifier/ "block" on which the whole structure was precariously balanced. In a similar fashion the author parodies the authentication of the iconic simulacra through scholarship and academic structures. Referring to the virtual snowballing of the academic discourse on Lenin in the years following his death, the narrator's commentary on the scholarly potential of the Indian part of Soviet history is full of double play: "Воистину бездонная тема 'Ленин в Индии', без сомнения, будет еще досконально исследована" (64).[175] Anyone familiar with the tradition of Soviet historiography will easily perceive the parodic tone, as volumes of academic and popular treatises explored the minute details of Lenin's work abroad and their presumed historical significance (titles such as "Lenin in Paris" or "Lenin in London" – among many others – should be well recognizable to an informed reader). The multi-layered simulacra of the Soviet society is paralleled by the multiple levels of unreality in the novel: not only the events in India are not historically true, but, within the novel's fictional space, Lenin is not real either.

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[175] "There is no doubt that the truly inexhaustible theme of 'Lenin in India' will be thoroughly researched."

Maintaining the reader's awareness of the tension between the reality and the simulacra, the author manipulates this dichotomy to create many ironic subtexts. His playing with the concept of "realness" and the connotative value of the word "real" creates the twofold implication of both authenticity and value. Thus, in the concluding chapter the narrator comments: "*Настоящее* государство то, которое умеет хранить свои тайны. Мы жили в *настоящем* государстве. Тайна великого похода, возможно, и не была бы тайной, если бы она не тянула за собой тайну Ленина-Шишкина. Очевидно, что, если бы эта тайна перестала быть тайной, существование нашего государства автоматически становилось бы невозможным" (95, my emphasis).[176] The narrator's perceived sense of pride for the "real" state he lives in is laden with irony created through the reader's knowledge and different perspective of this very "real" state. Zalotukha's fictional history is quite complex as it is a commentary on the tensions inherent in the actual history; arguably, it is not quite a case of a traditional alternative history because rather than engaging in an ontological play of possible worlds and multiple universes, it foregrounds the fundamental ambivalence of some problems in this nation's real history and questions many social and political aspects of its past and present.

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[176] "The *real* state is a state that can protect its secrets. We lived in a *real* state. The secret of the great march might not have been such a big secret if it hadn't involved the Lenin-Shishkin [i.e. the surrogate Lenin] secret. It is obvious that if this secret stopped being a secret, the existence of our state would automatically become impossible."

History as a Parodic Intertext

Apart from its explicit engagement in a socio-political dialogue, another important aspect of the novel is its multi-level parody and complex intertextuality. The novel is written in the form of a "revolutionary chronicle" that spans the period from the early 1920s to the mid-1990s. The touch of grandiosity, as occasioned by the form, is, however, continuously brought down. The ironic distance is created primarily through the temporal gap: the "chronicle" is both written in the post-Soviet context and read through the perspective of a post-Soviet reader. Thus it becomes a virtual playground of many historical facts and Soviet social and cultural realities as viewed from the vantage point of the 1990s. On another, more general level, the chronicle reads as a parody of historiographic evidence, as a historical document whose "truth" self-deconstructs or whose falsity becomes a precondition to its creation. In this context, the narrative structure of the novel and the narrative perspective are important strategies of enhancing the parodic reading of the text. The narrative unfolds on two main levels: one is the official commentary (the main narrative framework), while the other, the recreation of the "true" events that were suppressed and banned from the official records of the Soviet history. The official commentary, although characteristically dry in style and heavily relying on the recognizable clichés of the discourse of Soviet mass media, occasionally betrays unwitting slips to a highly individual, personal voice that not only lacks the sophistication of the rest of the commentary but appears to be quite simplistic if not primitive. Thus, for example, referring to the suppression of Lenin's "real" date of death (which in this fictional world happens to fall on May 1, 1923), the narrator adds that, after all, "может и хорошо, что ... не знали" ("maybe it [was] for the best") otherwise they would have had to fly flags at half-mast every 1st of May and make holiday decorations in black rather than the traditional red (66). The narrator's obvious childish sentiments about the memories of the former official holiday (the International Day of Workers) are rather ironic as the celebration was strongly enforced by the state and came down to the political display of the unwavering strength of the system; it had never been taken seriously by the majority of the population. The narrator's oscillation between an omniscient, omnipresent, objective voice of "truth" and the simple-minded persona behind the official mask foregrounds the extreme subjectivity of the "chronicle." The narrator himself appears to be a rather enigmatic figure (who is he? how did he come into possession of the facts he discloses to the reader?) whose political affiliations are not too hard to recognize as sympathetic with the regime and largely nostalgic for the Soviet past of Russia.

Another important aspect of Zalotukha's parody is his revisiting of the history of the Soviet military involvement outside Russia in the context of a colonial discourse. The narrator's unabashed pride in the revelation of the grandiosity of the early Soviet project (the great "liberation" of India) unwittingly betrays a conqueror's perspective. Although the government justification of the "liberation" should be understood as grounded in the Marxist idea of an international revolution and international anti-colonial movement, the ironic subtexts in the narrative's rhetoric reveal that Russia's role as a mediator of the revolutionary agency comes down to little more than a colonial conquest. Foregrounding the colonial ideology and domestic political interests behind the "liberationist" military operation works primarily on the level of a stylized colonial narrative (i.e., complete with the references to the "aboriginals" and "natives," descriptions of their supposed awe in the face of the conqueror's technology, etc.). It is interesting, however, that although the story establishes a clear hierarchy between the Soviet soldiers and Indian "natives" (and also later between the Soviet archeologists and the local population in India) and the Soviet conquistadors are assigned a superior status (although the superiority may be read as ambivalent), there is also another hierarchical binary – between the British and the Russians. Thus the author revisits the centuries-old tension inherent in Russia's mediating positioning between East and West and the geopolitical ambivalence that comes with it. The need for imperial expansion is at least in part theorized as a need to resolve this tension and to get established as a force comparable to the West.[177] There is no doubt that the anti-imperial commentary in the novel could be extended to all annexed Soviet republics as well as the Soviet military involvement abroad, particularly in Afghanistan. This moment of reflection on the historical role of the country and its nation on the international arena constitutes a significant development in the context of the 1990s post-imperial Russia.[178]

The novel features many levels of intertextuality and can be treated as one complex "intertext." Beyond the most obvious rereading of the genre (that of a chronicle, historical annals etc.), the novel not only questions the entire narrative of the Soviet (or even pre-Soviet Russian) history, but also parodically revisits the whole space of the Soviet culture in the broadest sense – its ritualism, structures of everyday life, models of social interaction, etc. – as well as early Soviet literature with its romantic treatment of the revolution and historical optimism. There is no doubt this type of intertextuality can be best appreciated by a reader who has first-hand familiarity with the Soviet culture and the reality of life in the Soviet state. An informed reader is also expected to recognize many allusions to and direct quotes from the works of Hegel and classical Marxism as well as better known writings of Lenin. Another important point of reference is Soviet mass media with its slogans, headlines, and familiar rhetorical cliches. The author also incorporates complex polyglossia, both in the literal and figurative senses: the scope of the novel is truly international, with Armenian, Azerbaijan, Georgian, Ukrainian, Hindu, British and other cultures coming together within one fictional space. All of these cultural spaces are also represented by linguistic means as well as by the discourses of Christianity and Hinduism.

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[177] Certainly, the same can be argued about the imperial ambitions of the czarist Russia.

[178] Some may point out that Valerii Zalotukha's name is not ethnically Russian (it may be potentially Bielorussian or Ukrainian – although he was born in Russia) and that he may appear more of an outsider in the critique of Russia's imperial external politics.

Although in this discussion of Zalotukha's work I have touched on the most important issues of his writing, another aspect of the novel merits at least a cursory mention. While gender issues do not figure prominently in *The Great March for the Liberation of India*, one cannot overlook the author's play with the space of masculinity and a clear implication of the aggressive (imperial) impetus as a projection of a male desire. Of particular interest here is the episode of a humourously heroic ascent of the peak of Nanda Devi in the southern Himalayas to install there the symbolic red banner;

the venture is as grandiose as the rest of the military operation and, clearly, just as doomed to failure. The psychoanalytical interpretation (clearly intended by the author and possibly parodied as a well-recognizable psychoanalytical cliché) certainly emphasizes the significance of the male agency and the possible reading of the whole theme of imperial drive as a "boys' game." This is further accentuated by the obvious persistence of the implication of "play" throughout the entire narrative. Although the plot and setting (albeit fictional) involve rather serious developments, the characters (including the actual Lenin) seem to be absorbed in a self-sufficient fun that may be associated with a simulated/virtual game where the participants enjoy the process of self-figuration through "writing" themselves into the game scenario. This narcissistic distance – always seeing oneself from askance, in a carefully positioned mirror – emphasizes both the simulated nature of the situation (as perceived by the "players") and, at the same time, their appropriation of reality for the bigger stakes of the male "game." This approach is certainly not unique to Zalotukha. For instance, another representative text of this type – only written from a clearly feminist perspective – is Liudmila Petrushevskaya's *Muzhskaia Zona* (The Man's Zone, 1994), a mini-play where the author brings together a number of historically prominent/notorious male figures/ "players" from across ages, and where the history-making process is conceptualized as a play zone of the archetypal male drive towards "[f]orm, convex, step, advance, semen, progress..." (Cixous 578).

In most of the examined postmodern works of the post-totalitarian period the concept of play acquires a distinct ideological function and serves as a vehicle for socio-political commentary. Zalotukha's lighthearted play with history – viewed from the vantage perspective of the 1990s – is an empowering tool of exercising control over the events that in the past condemned entire nations to the metadiscursive historical prison, just as Gretkowska's play creates a "liberated" cosmopolitan space that deliberately rejects any specific ideological, national, and religious structures; Sęktas's elaborate narrative play seems to be purposefully free from focusing on social issues – yet ironically cannot escape some rather sombre subtextual commentaries, and Andrukhovych's and Zabuzhko's games are inevitably played out in the context of the space of post-coloniality. All of these writings are both liberated and liberating because they not only contribute to a more diverse artistic ecology and acknowledge a validity of different views on literary creativity, but they also – and more importantly – create new models of thinking about today's reality and of conceptualizing the past.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The present study has examined the phenomenon of Central and East European postmodernism as part of the development of the literatures of totalitarian and post-totalitarian periods and as part of the broader context of Western and international postmodernism. The emergence of literary postmodernism in the countries of the former Soviet bloc has received little scholarly attention, and no systematic research has been done to address the issue in a comparative context. Although this study is not comprehensive in its scope, it has examined a range of representative problems that define the genesis and practice of postmodernism in the literary communities in question and analyzed a number of selected texts that exemplify these issues. In this thesis I have maintained that the reception of the literature of postmodernism in the countries in question (i.e. the relative lack of scholarly interest, rejection of the idea of postmodern tendencies in the 1960s-70s, among other problems) was grounded in the geopolitics and ideology of conceptualization of these historically decentered cultures (albeit "decentering" implies different socio-political contexts in each case) and in the prevalent understanding of postmodernism as an inherently Western phenomenon (i.e. belonging to the context of North America and Western Europe). This study has shown that Central and East European postmodernism(s) can be viewed as a development simultaneous to the Western model, although in this case the analogies are as significant as differences, idiosyncracies, and the always complex and ambivalent issue of intertextual links and influences.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the theoretical issues that play an important role in conceptualizing the problem of Central and East European postmodernism. Particular emphasis was placed on the significance of the geopolitical context in the reception of peripheral cultures. Although it can be argued that there had always been a tendency to homogenize Europe as a cultural body (mainly through the articulation of the East-West dichotomy in early modern Europe, and, more recently, with the rise of postcolonial studies that paradoxically reinforced the same dichotomy), the changes of the last few decades have brought to the foreground some of the problems inherent in the on-going construction of European identity. Today's stratification of Europe as a geopolitical entity is quite complex and certainly goes beyond the problem of the former sphere of Soviet influence; it is indisputable, however, that the cultures under discussion had long been historical European peripheries. Their later ideological and political separation from Europe during the years of the Soviet empire not only disrupted and significantly affected the cultural production, but also attached a long-term stigma to everything associated with this historical period and the region itself. Postmodernism participated in the complex process of negotiation of these cultures' status in a two-fold way: during the totalitarian period it constituted a discourse of resistance, and the conventions and aesthetic of socialist realism often functioned as a basis for this opposition. On the other hand, with the transition to the post-totalitarian period, postmodernism arguably served as one of the ideological tools of closing (or at least minimizing) the cultural and epistemological gap with the West.

Some of the key concepts examined in this chapter were the conditions of peripherality and postcoloniality. As a perspective and a distinct problematic, postcolonial studies has undergone a significant evolution since its emergence in the 1940-50ss: from focusing on the traditional dichotomy of the colonizer vs. colonized (in the wake of the disintegration of European empires) to embracing a broader applicability of the term. The latter came with the acknowledgment of a more complex stratification of power relations in today's world. Although many scholars now argue for the appropriateness of the concept of a postcolonial society for the situation in Central and Eastern Europe (particularly in the 1990s), the core/periphery model can also be useful in the conceptualization of the distribution of power both in the socio-economic and cultural spheres. The rigid binarism of this approach, however, can be counterbalanced by the concept of semi-periphery as a mediating condition that reflects the positioning of the cultures in question both in the European and global contexts.

Another important aspect of the analysis was situating the development of Central and East European postmodernism in the context of postcoloniality or peripherality. Irrespective of which designation is preferred, both conditions are directly opposite to the postmodern impetus away from the center, which creates a clash of centrifugal and centripetal drives. This situation manifests some typical tensions, primarily between postmodern cosmopolitanism and the post-totalitarian search for national identity, deconstruction of the myth of history and the need for an "authentic" history. The rapport between the discourses of postmodernism and postcoloniality/peripherality becomes one of the more important aspects of the literature of the post-totalitarian period.

Finally, I argued that it is necessary to differentiate two stages in the development of the discussed postmodernist tradition: the 1960-80s, and the 1990s to present. Two factors were emphasized in the discussion of the first stage: the role of the modernist platform (even though the modernist project was incomplete in the Ukrainian and Russian traditions) and the oppositionary function of postmodernism in relation to the inscribed official artistic code within the totalitarian structure; in fact both modernism and socialist realism may present equally viable platforms from which postmodernist experimentations had sprung. Also, in the relative absence of the homogenizing Western influence, we witness more idiosyncratic manifestations of postmodernist literary practice on the local ground. The second wave of postmodernism is characterized primarily by the liberation of cultural production from the ideological and aesthetic restrictions of the officially inscribed code and by ever growing exposure to the Western culture. The pro-Western drive had always been an important factor in the negotiation of the status of these mediated territories, but in the 1990s it became an explicit ideological tool of cultural re-orientation and geopolitical re-mapping. Postmodernism played an important role in the expression of this pro-Western impetus. Some of the other factors that played a significant role in the shaping of post-totalitarian postmodernist practice were extensive popularization of the poststructuralist/ deconstructionist philosophy, the gradual disappearance of the oppositional role of postmodernism, and the radical shift in the very conceptualization of the status of literature in these societies (the decline of the "messianic" function of literature).

In Chapter 2, I argued that within the literary corpus of the totalitarian period there is a body of works that can be situated in the context of the postmodernist aesthetic. Building on the theoretical premises elaborated in Chapter 1, I examined a number of texts that were representative of the processes that defined the development of Central and East European postmodernism during this period. In Polish literature, Mach and Lem were two of the more important influences, whose contribution to the postmodernist tradition both nationally and internationally (particularly in the early stage) has not been sufficiently acknowledged in scholarly literature. Mach's writing, although manifesting some affinities with the French *nouveau roman* tradition and being expressly apolitical, at the same time can be conceptualized as a response to the socio-political environment of the time. His articulation of identity crisis, search for meaning and epistemological void constructed in the novel had a strong impact on the destabilization of the realist tradition in Poland. On the other hand, Lem, speaking from the literary margins of the discourse of science fiction, contributed some of the quintessential examples of postmodernism of the 19060s-70s. The Ukrainian "chimerical" novel (Hutsalo, Shevchuk) is a particularly interesting phenomenon, as the writers of the genre worked from within the official discourse and subverted it using the existing inventory of the officially inscribed code (which may be construed as a typical deconstructionist strategy). Of specific interest is the issue of spatial construction in the "chimerical" novel, which makes it at least in part analogous to Latin American magic realism as a discourse of resistance. Russian dissent fiction, represented in this study by Erofeev and Bitov, is a powerful commentary on the nation's coming to terms with its imperial past and present and with the harbouring of "otherness" within. Both Erofeev and Bitov play with the founding myths of the imperial nation and engage in a sacrilegious destruction of the tradition to expose the cultural, intellectual, and political impotence of the nation and the system. Although all of the above authors manifest many parallels with what may be conceptualized as mainstream postmodernism, they, at the same time, work within and respond to particular socio-political conditions, which makes their works culturally specific.

In Chapter 3, I attempted to conceptualize the second-wave postmodernism in Central and Eastern Europe as a phenomenon significantly different from that of the totalitarian period. Literary production of the 1990s and beyond manifests a complex relationship with the legacy of the totalitarian period, at the same time openly acknowledging the Western model. The 1990s witness a wave of historiographic writing, more explicit focus on articulating postcolonial/post-imperial space, the rise of women's postmodernist fiction, and a greater emphasis on the significance of play as an ultimate libertarian (albeit utopian) space. Postmodernism becomes institutionalized: textbooks are written and courses are taught on the subject, and earlier representative postmodern texts become an important part of the national canon. During the period of the 1990s, postmodernism is – at least in part – an ideological tool of declaration of pro-Western sentiments and geopolitical re-orientation of the cultures in question.

The scope of writing of this period tends to be rather eclectic both in terms of the range of postmodernist technical inventory employed by the authors and in terms of style and themes, as represented by the selection of the analyzed texts. At the same time, however, this corpus of literature is unified by some common issues and concerns of the post-totalitarian period, such as coming to terms with a new cosmopolitanism and (re)articulating national space and national identity (Gretkowska, Zabuzhko), rewriting of history and addressing the postcolonial/post-imperial reality (Tryzna, Andrukhovych, Zalotukha), seeking a female perspective and female voice through the subversion of patriarchal language (Gretkowska, Zabuzhko), and negotiating the limits of play (Sęktas, Zalotukha). Postmodernism of the 1990s in the former countries of Soviet influence was more than a wave of fashionable literary experimentation; it made an important contribution to the restoration of pluralism both in the social and cultural spheres, and helped to recover marginal voices, provide an alternative epistemology, and reconceptualize history and contemporaneity.

The present study has a number of implications for future research both in the immediate context of Central and East European literatures and cultures and in the broader framework of related areas:

1. This study serves as a good basis for a more comprehensive examination of the postmodernist practice in the literary communities of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe with the inclusion of a broader scope of authors as well as more varied cultural representation (e.g., Slovak, Czech, Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian, possibly the Baltic states). Common socio-historical experiences in these societies and similarities of the geopolitical context justify the basis for such an analysis. This research project would potentially constitute a book-length study and would also contribute to the scholarship on international postmodernism, which, with a few exceptions discussed in Chapter 1, does not currently exist.

2. The scholarship on the Central and East European literatures of the totalitarian period has been of a rather uniform nature in the sense that it focused almost exclusively either on the discourse of socialist realism or on the dissident reaction to the latter. The conceptualization of the totalitarian period as dominated by the practice of socialist realism may be misleading as the conditions varied from country to country. Apart from the fact that

the cultures of the satellite states experienced different degrees of impact of totalitarian ideology and censorship, the cultures within the Soviet state itself found different ways of resistance and subversion of the dominant discourse from within the system. The perceived homogeneity of cultural and literary production within the framework of the dominance of socialist realism (or even within the broader context of the totalitarian structure generally) does not represent many aspects of a more diverse literary ecology that is still to be explored in scholarship.

3. Some of the insights in this study may have broader implications for the theory of postcoloniality and peripherality. Although the scope of postcolonial studies has been a matter of debate for some time now, it is becoming increasingly more clear that the concept of postcoloniality embraces a wider range of contexts and power structures compared to its earlier applications. On the other hand, the condition of peripherality may be less specific and thus more flexible in description of the hierarchization and distribution of power and domination in today's world. In the context of the present study these concepts have immediate implications for the area of European studies and the examination of the processes of identity formation, articulation of the national space, and distribution, circulation and exchange of cultural knowledge. These processes become particularly relevant in today's Europe with its ambivalent attitudes towards European Union and the simultaneous struggle towards unity on the one hand and further national compartmentalization on the other. It also appears that the theory of peripherality may be increasingly more relevant in the context of globalization.

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